

A small, four year old followed her mother, aunt, cousin and grandmother down the cobbled streets of Diagon Alley, staring around her in absolute awe at the bright colours that shone out of every window as she hurried to keep up with her mother. Things whirled, spun, croaked, whirled and screeched from every window they passed, making the girl's eyes widen until they closely resembled small bludgers.

People passed them, laughing and talking; their happy moods infectious though the small girl knew that to appear anything less than coldly detached from what her mother called 'worthless frivolity' was not allowed. Tearing her attention away from the brightness and happiness of a firework shop she turned around only to find she had lost her mother in the crowd.

Suddenly the great hustle and bustle of the place seemed overwhelming to the small child and very frightening as the prospect of being lost gradually became more real.

Biting her lip she fought back the tears that threatened to erupt, as her father didn't like tears, and tried to think clearly.

Her mother had said that she needed some new robes but...which shop? The girl looked around wildly, fighting down the panic as she spotted a large shop with robes in the front window.

Taking a deep breath she walked quickly over towards the shop, pushed the door open and walked in. The front room was large and spacious with racks of robes lining the walls. Two families were standing in the middle of the room, watching as three boys got fitted for some robes. A red headed woman was fussing over a black haired boy.

"Harry really, stop fidgeting. Don't you want to look nice for your father's promotion party?"

She didn't sound angry like her own mother would have been at her, more fondly exasperated and the small girl backed into the shadows and watched, waiting for an opportunity to ask the witch behind the counter if she had seen her mother.

“Why can’t I wear jeans?” the messy black haired boy replied sulkily. He was about her age, now the girl came to look at him, with emerald green eyes.

“Yeah, why not Lils? After all he is my son,” a taller version of the boy asked the red headed woman, laughing.

Another black haired man who was standing next to a blond woman, burst out laughing which earned him a disapproving look from the red head.

“Why don’t we all wear jeans...shock everyone!” he laughed and the small girl was struck of how much he looked like her aunt.

The red haired woman was about to reply when she caught sight of the little girl in the corner.

“Hello sweetheart,” she coaxed gently, coming up to her, “are you here by yourself?”

Her voice was kind and warm and the small girl found that she wanted to cry even more. Fighting them back she stepped hesitantly out of the shadows towards the woman who had come up to her and nodded.

“I’m...I’m lost,” she said.

“Well that’s alright. You can wait here with us until your mummy and daddy come back for you.”

Having being so preoccupied at the concept of getting lost the girl hadn’t thought of what her mother’s reaction to her disappearing would be and somehow the thought was terrifying. Her mother would believe that she had wandered off deliberately and so would refer her to her father for punishment when they got home. The thought was enough to tip the girl over the edge and she burst into tears.

“Shh...it’s alright, don’t cry.” The woman had taken her into her arms and the smell of flowers and cleanliness washed over her. “Your

mummy and daddy will be back to pick you up, don't worry. Now," she added, crouching down and wiping her tears away, "What is your name?"

"A...Athenia."

"Athenia! What a nice name. My name is Lily and it is alright; like I said you can stay with us until your parents come to get you."

"Father's at work, he's not here," Athenia said quietly as she thought how angry he would be at her when he got in.

"Is your mother here then?" Lily asked and Athenia nodded,

"Yes, with Grandmother, Auntie Bellatrix and Lyra."

The occupants of the room had frozen at the name Bellatrix as the thought of who this girl was slowly came to mind.

Lily, however, carried on despite her feelings.

"Really? And who is Lyra?"

"My cousin, Auntie Bellatrix's daughter; she's four like me."

"Ah right, and is she your friend?"

Athenia scrunched up her nose at the thought of Lyra. They were polar opposites in every way possible.

"Sometimes...when we go over to uncle Rodolphus's we play together; but I prefer Aleric as he lets me go on his broom sometimes when I ask nicely."

Lily was worried. She knew Rodolphus Lestrage as well as Bellatrix and knew how fanatical they were about blood purity. Lily had been having problems at work because of her blood status and it was only her husband's promotion to head of the Auror department that had secured her job.

However if she was discovered to have a child related to those two in her care Rodolphus Lestrage could kick up holy hell in the ministry. However Lily had always had a soft spot for children and looking into Athenia's big sapphire blue eyes which were wet with tears, she found that's she couldn't turn her away.

"It's alright. I didn't like my cousins very much either," she whispered and was rewarded with a small watery smile.

The rest of the afternoon flew by sitting outside the ice cream parlour with The Potters and Blacks, waiting for her mother to come and get her. However as time passed Athenia became more and more worried that she wasn't coming back. James and Sirius had been against looking after the girl but one look from Lily and they decided that any protestations were not worth it. So they put up with having the dark haired, blue eyed girl with them; praying to Merlin that she would be found soon.

However as time passed James was becoming of the same mind as Athenia, though he didn't know it. After revealing her feelings about her cousins she had gone mute, looking around worriedly every few minutes, though she hadn't left Lily's side all afternoon and the shops were beginning to close up for the day.

"I think James that we should take her home and you could contact her aunt..."

James looked appalled at the idea of contacting Bellatrix; but staring at the small girl it was evident no one was coming for her and it was either leave her here or take her back.

Sighing he nodded resignedly, hating this predicament the child had put him in and the idea of contacting the Lestranges more and more.

Walking back to the Leaky cauldron they bid the Blacks goodbye before Lily took her hand along with the boy's and stepped into the fireplace.

"Potter residence, Godric's Hollow!" A green flame flew up and Athenia found herself clinging tightly to the woman as she felt herself

spinning very fast. Having never travelled by floo powder before, always side long apparition, she found it very discomfoting and was almost glad when she landed in an undignified heap on a floor.

Lily helped her up while Harry ran off to play on his broomstick, finding the silent girl boring.

“Now come into the kitchen dear and we will wait for James to contact your aunt.”

Shaking Athenia followed the woman through into a small cosy stone kitchen. Her father would be furious with her! Absolutely furious! Not only had she been disloyal towards Lyra, but she had also been talking to people who she was sure her father would not approve; and to top that off she had returned back to their house with them. After divulging the information about Lyra and Aleric she had decided to be quiet, despite their questions, as it lowered any chance she had of getting into deeper trouble.

The tall black haired man with round glasses came in, bouncing his son on his shoulders before putting him on a chair.

“I will go contact your aunt now. I’ve no doubt she’ll be home?” James asked the shaking girl who nodded. Looking at her James felt pity stir in his heart at what she would probably become in later years, before turning away. Sad as it might be there was nothing he could do as he had his own family to protect.

Grabbing a handful of floo powder he threw it into the fire before getting down on his knees and shouting

“Lestrange Manor.”

His head appeared in a plush study with dark mahogany wall panelling and heavily carpeted floor. Book cases lined the back wall and in front of it was a large desk with a chair behind it. In front of the fireplace were three emerald green armchairs and it was in these that the two Lestrange brothers, sat, stunned at the sudden appearance of the last person they expected to make a fireplace call.

“I have something that might be yours, Lestrangle,” James addressed his colleague, Rodolphus, who was head of the control and regulation of magical creatures. Smaller and slighter than his thickset brother, Rodolphus had a full head of dark brown hair and a sharp thin cunning face and quick dark green eyes that glittered maliciously in his face.

“Really Potter? And what may that be?”

“Your niece I believe: Athenia?”

The other man’s face registered his shock for a second before he carefully concealed it. Of course he had heard from Bellatrix that the girl had run off but as Bellatrix had returned early with Lyra he had supposed that she had been found was being suitably punished for her disobedience. For her to have been gone this long and then turn up at Potters house was beyond the limit.

Standing up he arched a condescending eye brow down at the man he despised,

“Indeed? And what is she doing with you may I ask?”

“I believe she got separated from her mother in Diagon Alley,” James ground out, trying to keep his temper in check, “and my wife decided to take her back home where we could contact you and you could come and collect her...”

Rodolphus resisted the urge to ask why Potter hadn’t contacted her father instead of him, and rose out of his chair before turning to his brother who was glaring menacingly at Potter.

“I will be back shortly. While I am gone can you contact Jason and tell him of...this problem, and say that I will return her home myself?”

Rabastan nodded and Rodolphus stepped towards the fireplace as James withdrew out of it, sanding up just as the flames turned emerald green and Rodolphus stepped into the living room, looking about him in absolute disgust.

“Where is she?”

James turned and led the way into the kitchen and Rodolphus’s eyes narrowed at his niece, who was sitting staring at her hands at the kitchen table with Lily sitting opposite her, speaking softly to her. The girl should know better than to interact with such filth.

“Athenia!” Athenia’s head snapped up and any colour drained from her face as she looked up at her feral uncle. “Come here now.”

Obediently, Athenia mutely walked over to her uncle who grabbed her in his vice grip.

“I am very displeased with you, girl; and I can only imagine how your father will feel when he hears of you interacting with mudbloods...”

“Don’t you dare call my wife that...” James snarled, jumping in with his wand raised high.

“Why not? All I am doing is saying how it is,” Rodolphus replied coldly, his own wand in his free hand; though not raised, “Something which you seem to have a problem with seeing, Potter.”

Shifting his grip so he was now holding Athenia by the scruff of her neck he turned her round and pushed her towards the lounge, giving her a kick on her backside to speed things up.

Lily watched the rough way he treated the girl with sadness. She had known that Rodolphus wouldn’t be civil to herself but she had never imagined how that he would treat his own flesh and blood this way.

Lestrangle’s voice travelled back through the hallway over the sound of a child sobbing.

“Stop crying, Athenia! Now! You brought this on yourself with your disobedience, so don’t you dare cry about it in front of me!”

The sound of erupting flames and Rodolphus voice yelling out their destination faded, leaving a long silence.

James walked over to his wife and held her close as she began to sob.

“There is nothing we can do Lils...”

“She looked so sacred though, and she’s only a child....”

James smiled at his wife and held her closer while placing a kiss on the top of her head. Suddenly Lily pulled away, a fierce look on her face. James recognised the look and his suspicions were immediately raised

“Lily?”

“I’m going to raise awareness in the ministry about this...children can’t be treated like that...”

“The ministry won’t listen Lily; treating children in this manner is seen as almost normal...so long as the child is fed, housed and...”

“You weren’t!”

“No, I was just brought up to be an insufferable arrogant toe rag,” he joked before turning serious, “I don’t mean to sound pessimistic about this but you will be up against a lot of opposition...”

“I don’t care James,” Lily snapped, “No child should have to look that petrified. No child should have that look on her face at all.”

James just stayed silent. Being pureblood, he knew how pureblood families worked and how they raised their children. Athenia’s treatment was not unheard of.

“I agree Lily...”

“Then you will help me?”

James stared at his wife, seeing the stubborn determination in her face before sighing. However before he could reply his son flew into the room on his broomstick, smashing into the fridge.

James watched as Lily's attention was successfully diverted from Athenia and hoped that it would stay that way as Lily really had no idea how much power the Lestrange family held.

However neither of them would know that in the years to come the kindness that Lily showed Athenia would affect her. Neither knew that the one act of kindness would stay with the girl through the long and lonely nights that were to come. And neither would know that ultimately it was that one act of kindness that would motivate the small girl, in the many years to come, to fight out against Blood Purity Oppression and, maybe most important of all, Voldemort, and which would motivate her to earn a First Class Order of Merlin in years to come!

Despite what many people said, kindness left its mark; a much deeper, lasting mark than cruelty, such a evil act, ever did!

No, as James Potter watched his wife fuss over his only son and heir he knew none of these things, either in the symbolic emotional aspect; nor in the future predictions.

A long way away in the Yorkshire Moors, hidden by protective enchantments that had been in place for centuries, stood a huge three story, grey stone manor house surrounded by a large wrought iron fence and huge gates with a coat of arms wrought into the gates around a large R.

It was in this house that Athenia was now, standing in her father's study silently waiting for him to finish the work he was doing so he could get her punishment over and done with.

Finally Jason Rivers placed aside the piece of parchment he was working on and turned to face his daughter who could barely see over the huge desk. Standing up and taking out his wand he walked round the desk until he was behind her.

"Do you know what I was just finishing there, Athenia?"

"N...no, father."

"I was just signing a law, regarding mudbloods and their places in the ministry. If I manage to get this act passed through then it will mean only purebloods will be able to have high positions in the ministry. Now, how do you think it will look if it becomes common knowledge in the ministry that my own daughter was seen fraternising with the very people I was trying to put in their place?"

"B...bad?"

"Very bad," Jason carried on in his coldest voice, "Very bad indeed. I will tell you now Athenia that I am disgusted by your behaviour today. Going to Diagon Alley with your mother was meant to be a reward for your good behaviour lately, though I can see that it would be better for your sake if rewards are put on hold while you are punished."

Athenia hung her head as the humiliation crept in. Even though it was only her father and herself in the room her father would make sure that everyone knew that she was in disgrace.

"I'm sorry sir...It wo...won't happen again," Athenia recited the correct words in her most respectful voice as she had been taught to do.

Jason sat down on the edge of the desk and surveyed the trembling girl in front of him. This wasn't the first time Athenia had disobeyed him and he doubted it would be the last. The girl had a knack for getting into trouble and Jason decided to take his brother-in-law's words to heart and root it out of her while she was still young.

"You have shamed the family Athenia, by running away from your mother and interacting with mudbloods and blood traitors." He raised his wand as Athenia looked up at him, her face tear stained, "And you are right Athenia, it won't happen again. I'll make sure of it." Now a steel edge had crept into his voice and Athenia just registered it as the punishment curse flew towards her and pain exploded behind her eyes.

Jason carried on the punishment session well into the night and it was around midnight when he finally called the nanny to take her

away along with instructions of how she was to be treated until he said otherwise.

After the door had closed Jason collapsed into his chair, exhausted himself while dropping his wand onto the desk. Finally deciding that it was time to go to bed he dragged himself up and left the study, magically locking it as it was his domain in the house. One more punishment to dish out then he could sleep. At least, he thought, tomorrow was Saturday so he could sleep in and have his breakfast late.

Walking upstairs he entered his room and was pleased to see his wife still up, sitting at her vanity in the corner of the large green and silver room. She spied him in the mirror and placed down her brush before turning round

“Jason?”

“It is dealt with. The child won’t run away again, I can assure you of that.”

Ella ‘Lestrange’ Rivers nodded, her long perfect dark brown curls bouncing about on her shoulders as she surveyed her husband.

Tall and lean Jason Damien Rivers had neat blond hair and sapphire blue eyes. His face, although handsome, had a cruel steel edge to it that he enforced on his offspring and spouse to ensure obedience in his household. However his blood was one of the purest in the wizarding world, and when they were younger had been considered one of the best catches for unmarried pureblood girls. So many people had been exited, and jealous, when it had become public knowledge that she was marrying into the ‘Most High and Great family of Rivers’.

“I would like you to relay the rules to the rest of the household, my dear, as we wouldn’t want our daughter to misunderstand my message about obedience now, would we?” he offered as he came further into the room, closing the door behind him before closing the space between them.

“No, Jason, we wouldn’t,” Ella replied slowly, looking at her husband; suspicious in case he decided to punish her also, for ‘losing’ the girl.

Taking his wife’s hand he led her to the centre of the room towards a mirror in the corner which he turned her towards. Tall and willowy in frame with her long dark hair cascading down her back, her body was enhanced by the flimsy nightdress she wore. Her dark emerald eyes showed her apprehension as she stared at her reflection.

“The first is that she is to stay in the nursery until I say otherwise, the second is that she is to be on bread and water for a week; absence of food is a good treatment for bad behaviour in children. The only time she is to leave the house is when she is with me. You proved your incompetence today by letting her get away when you know what she is like.”

Ella’s spine stiffened as Jason undid the tie at the back of her nightdress, pushing the loose material off her shoulders where it fell to the floor, pooling round her feet.

Jason stared at his wife, a moment of pride taking over his anger. After baring three children she was as slim as the day he had married her. Her hair was gorgeous and her looks hadn’t faded unlike some wives that he had seen; such as Goyles wife, Lucy, who after having one child had ballooned up and seemed to have lost all her looks over night.

Sliding his wand down her back he smiled when she stiffened some more. She knew what was coming; Ella wasn’t stupid in that way.

“I’m...I’m sorry Jason; it won’t happen again.”

“Yes, that is what Athenia said earlier and, like you, she was right. It won’t happen again, I’ll ensure it.”

The first curse hit Ella on her shoulder, leaving a large angry red welt. More curses hit Ella though she didn’t make a sound as each one made its mark on her body.

Jason didn't take as long in punishing his wife; partly because he was tired and partly because he knew Ella was telling the truth when she said it wouldn't happen again. Despite Ella's faults, she had been brought up properly with the right values and knew that her loyalty lay towards her husband and family.

Ella felt her husband lower his wand and opened her eyes, the only movement she made until she could be sure that Jason had completely calmed down. His next action, however, proved so.

Walking round he gave her a kiss on her forehead before leading her towards the bed and climbing in next to her.

He would give her a rest tonight, he decided graciously, but the punishment marks could stay. As long as Athenia stayed in the nursery his wife would have to bare those marks as a remembrance of her crime in losing their daughter.

He took her into his arms and whispered as much in her ear. Her only response was a small whimper and a nod. Satisfied that she had learnt her lesson Jason lay back and closed his eyes. Within minutes he was asleep, blissfully unaware that the cruelty he continually inflicted on his family would be his downfall one day; and as fate dictated that day was not so far off!

It happened a month later. Jason had known that the Aurors were still rooting out death eaters but his arrogance had led him to believe that as Head of Magical Law Enforcement he was untouchable.

Sitting in the drawing room with his wife and children he was surprised when six aurors burst in, claiming he was under arrest for 'Death Eater activities.' Before he could do anything Ella went mad, sending curse after curse at the Aurors; not caring who, or what, she hit.

Dimly aware that his children had retreated behind a tall grandfather cloak and were hiding, Athenia holding Lewis, one year old, closely. However he had more pressing matters on his mind and started firing curses randomly at the thought of these mudblood taking him in. The shame of it!

A green light flew towards his wife, hitting her in the chest. The Aurora who sent the spell laughed as her wand went flying in the air, making a graceful arching motion before landing with a clatter near the grandfather clock.

Rage taking over his mind as he watched his wife, usually so strong; so loyal towards him, fall gracefully towards the floor with her eyes wide open he felt insanity take over.

Curses flew dangerously randomly. He managed to knock down three out of six Aurors before a flashing bright green light flew towards him. The last thing he saw before death proclaimed him was his daughter's pale white face; fear etched across her usually composed features. He tried to call out to her before death took him, tried to call that she was a Rivers and should remember it. But somehow he had lost the capacity of speech, for once, so was unable to convey this last message to his daughter.

Athenia watched from her hiding place, traumatised, as her father, so strong and powerful in life, fell defeated next to her mother. Her three year old brother, and heir to the Rivers estate, Damian, was huddled up to her sobbing quietly. Lewis, at one year old, was crying in her small arms as she held him awkwardly; her four year old arms not big enough to hold a year old baby.

The events that followed were, and always would be until her third year at Hogwarts, a blur in every way. The men in maroon robes took her and her brothers away from her home. She had a vague memory of crying and screaming though later she would wonder if this was true and taken to Lestrangle manor where her uncle admitted them, listening with a grim face as the bad men told him of the Rivers death and, as the Lestranges were the Rivers children next of kin, it fell to him to take them in.

Would he do it? Rodolphus was disgusted that anyone would question his family loyalty; especially towards his baby sister of all people. Ella had been dearer to him than anyone else in his life.

Later that night his father died, therefore leaving Rodolphus as head of the family. After the children had been put to bed, Aleric stupefied as the boy had been so exited he had left Rodolphus no choice, Rodolphus stood in his study staring out into the night, remembering.

It was when the clock struck midnight that Rodolphus made his promise to his dead sister. A promise to raise her children as she would want; to stamp Athenia's disobedience out of her before it was too late and to ensure that whatever Athenia's father may of thought, she would get a good marriage when the girl turned seventeen. The best, if Rodolphus had his way. And he wouldn't get caught for his past crimes, he vowed; that he would make sure of because, if he, his wife, brother and sister in law were caught then who would raise the children? A muggle orphanage most certainly and Rodolphus would die before that happened.

Okay, like I said it is very different to the first one. However I'll be honest now and say I don't mind flames so long as you tell me why you don't like the story; any constructive criticism is welcome.

Thanks guys, please review. Cheers.

Athenia woke up to bright sunlight piercing through her eyes. The light was painfully bright and it took her a couple of minutes for her eyes to adjust. When they did she noticed two things:

One was that her aunt Hera was standing at the bottom of her bed, her flabby arms crossed over her fat chest, looking very irritated. The second was that her uncle Rabastan was leaning in the doorway lazily, his eyes raking over the messy room with clothes dumped on the floor, her waste basket tipped over, old quills lying about and book overturned.

Athenia inwardly cringed at the dark look on his face. If there was one thing her uncles hated it was messiness. Unfortunately, being eleven, Athenia didn't have the same views.

"...filthy Athenia; if this had been my room at your age my father would have whipped me raw for living like a pig...are you a pig Athenia? No, I didn't think so. Really, girl, your uncles are far too lenient with you; if I had my way..."

And she was off, trailing through her many fantasy threats of what she would do to her most hated niece if she 'had her way'. Athenia tuned her out, keeping one eyes on her silent uncle. If she had learnt anything from living at Lestrage manor it was that her aunt's opinions didn't count for much; it was her uncles she had to watch out for.

"Hera, get the girl up and bring her downstairs to the study. Rodolphus wants to see her before we go off to Diagon Alley," Rabastan cut through before leaving the doorframe, disappearing from sight.

Athenia listened to her uncle's footsteps fade away while her aunt stared at the spot where he had been only moments before, her face an unhealthy shade of red at Rabastan's order. If Hera hated one thing it was not being in control; especially when it came to punishments.

Turning a blood shot eyes towards Athenia she barked,

“You heard your uncle girl; get up or we will be leaving without you!”

Not waiting to be told twice Athenia jumped out of bed and ran towards the wash basin, aware of her aunt's eyes on her. Dressing quickly she turned around for inspection.

Hera walked up to the small girl, her lips puckered out in the most grotesque fashion. The seven years that Athenia had lived in the manor had not been kind to Hera at all. Baring four children, three of which were girls much to Rabastan's dismay, showed heavily round her middle. The honest word to use, Athenia thought, was that her aunt was fat...fat and small. Her looks seemed to have gone out of the window sometime after the twins were born five years ago and now lines and wrinkles marred her face. It didn't help that her sister in law, Bellatrix, even after baring two children, was still as slim as ever and if possible, the years had matured her dark good looks making her even more gorgeous. In comparison Hera looked like a bad joke. No wonder her uncle had found himself a mudblood piece on the side. Even a mudblood was better than waking up to Hera's face, Athenia thought savagely.

Hera wiped away some invisible wrinkles on her dark blue robes with big podgy fingers, weighed heavily with gold rings.

“Brush your hair and run along to the study girl.”

Dragging a brush through her hair Athenia let her long dark brown ringlets loose down her back, too lazy to pull them back into a pony tail. Following her aunt out of her bedroom she walked down the long winding hallway lined with moving portraits of her ancestors who called out as they passed.

Like her aunt Athenia ignored them though she kept on glancing at her aunt as they walked, wondering what had put her aunt in such a foul mood. Suddenly, Hera stopped making Athenia look up; and in that moment Athenia knew why Hera looked petrified. There, in front of them, was Bellatrix; tall dark and imposing as always. Strangely it was always Bellatrix who kept Hera in line, ensuring her spitefulness didn't get out of control.

“Hera,” the greeting was clipped, “Now girl, come with me.”

And, without waiting for an answer, grabbed Athenia’s arm and frog marched her in the opposite direction.

“Bella!” Hera’s voice came floating back to them, surprisingly strong considering who she was speaking to. Bellatrix paused, her lips thinning in impatience before turning round to her sister in law,

“Yes?” The word, said so calmly, sent prickles of fear up Athenia’s spine.

“Rabastan said that Rodolphus wanted to see the girl...”

“In our private rooms,” there was malicious malice in Bellatrix’s voice as she said these words and Athenia watched Hera’s face go pink; though with anger or humiliation (as Rabastan didn’t share a bed with her anymore) Athenia couldn’t tell; Bellatrix was still talking; “What he has to say to the girl he doesn’t want, ah, undeserving ears to hear; if you catch my meaning?” Her voice had dropped to a soft almost sickly sweet tone.

Hera just stared at Bellatrix and Bellatrix, never one to deny a challenge, stared back. Athenia watched, knowing who would win but unable to tear her eyes away from the two opponents. They were unfairly matched: Bellatrix, dressed in her second skin dress of black with a pendant round her neck which bore the Black coat of arms: Simple but effective. Her stance was one of a tiger ready to pounce, or a warrior ready to go to battle; safe in the knowledge of her ability. Opposite this image of power was a small fat woman wearing ridiculously bright gold robes; her hands and neck weighed down by the amount of gold jewellery she wore.

There was no comparison.

Hera broke eye contact first and turned away,

“I’ll leave you to it then,” she called over her shoulder as she wobbled away.

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes at Hera's retreating back, fingering her wand which was in her free hand. For a minute Athenia thought that Bellatrix was about to curse Hera, but Bellatrix turned away, resuming their fast frog march up the corridor and towards a small back staircase, hidden behind what she had previously thought was a solid piece of wall, moving only when Bellatrix ran her finger down a crack.

Athenia knew that there were plenty of hidden passageways in the manor, having found quite a few in her younger years with Damian and, when he got old enough, Lewis. Athenia had always been closer to her brothers than her cousins, with the exception of the twins and Aleric.

The staircase, although small, was heavily carpeted in emerald green and the handle was solid silver, engraved with small snakes with tiny emeralds for eyes. At the top of the staircase was a large elaborate mahogany door with a big round silver door knob.

Rapping smartly on the door Bellatrix opened it and pushed Athenia into her uncles living quarters.

Despite living with her uncle for seven years she had never seen, nor knew the whereabouts, of his and Bellatrix's rooms.

The room itself was huge with a thick emerald green carpet covering every inch of floor. A large rectangle black rug with the Lestrangle coat of arms lay in front of a roaring stone fireplace, which was the main source of heat. In front of the fire were two large comfy looking green armchairs with a small mahogany table and a chess board between the chairs. Opposite the fire was a huge four poster bed with silver, black and green hangings with a luxurious looking green silk covering. On either side of the bed were two mahogany bed side tables; the tables were the only things that held personal things. On one side, Athenia noticed, was a photo of two teenage boys and a small eleven year old girl. They were all wearing their Slytherin robes and smiling proudly at the camera. The photo was framed by a simple yet effective silver frame. Next to it was a large leather bound book and on top of that was a wrapped gift. On the other table was the Black coat of arms painted on a piece of parchment and framed lovingly. Next to it was a framed picture of a tall boy with brown hair

and the trademark Lestrangle smirk: her aunt's pride and joy beside her heritage; Aleric Lestrangle. Lyra was noticeably missing.

The walls were lined with bookshelves; each packed with books on blood purity or the Dark Arts or, in some cases, very advanced potion guides and it was as Athenia was looking over them that she got the fright of her life as she heard, before seeing, her uncle come out of his place behind one of the armchairs.

"Feel privileged Athenia; only Aleric has seen the head of the family's private quarters," then, incredibly, Rodolphus smiled, "But anyway, follow me; I have something for you. A late birthday present if you will."

Athenia mutely followed her uncle towards the bedside table where the wrapped gift was, Athenia's curiosity overriding her initial sense of fear at being in her uncles private rooms alone with said uncle and scary aunt.

"Here you go," he said, placing the gift in her hands.

"Thank you uncle," she replied while feeling it suspiciously. Her birthday had been last week and although it had been an elaborate affair Athenia had felt that it was all superficial; that her birthday had been only an excuse for the family to throw a ball. Why was her uncle giving her this gift now? What was hidden behind the sparkly paper?

Carefully peeling the paper away Athenia raised her eyebrows at the wooden box. Honestly, it was nothing striking to look at or hold. It was as if someone had taken five pieces of wood of the same size and hammered them together before placing another piece of wood on top as a makeshift lid. If Athenia had seen it in a shop she would have walked right passed it.

Rodolphus was watching her with a crafty expression on his face,

"Yes Athenia, it is rather unremarkable isn't it? Yet your mother bought it from Knock Turn Alley. Although Ella never divulged the full secrets of the box, she did tell me some interesting facts about what it holds."

Athenia had taken the lid off the box and looked inside. What she saw nearly made her pass out with shock. On the outside the box looked to be shallow, maybe a couple of inches deep. When she had opened the box she had looked down into a large deep stone cavern which, if she could see right, had tunnels trailing off from the original main area. And in there already were piles and piles of things.

“The box, as you have rightly guessed, is deceptive. You can store anything you want in there and you will always have space. There are things in there that Ella had already placed in before she died, though as I am not the owner of the box I cannot remove anything; in addition to that, if you are rummaging around down there don’t touch anything you don’t recognise,” Athenia knew this was the closest he would come to say ‘be careful’.

Rodolphus was still talking,

“I also know Ella wanted you to have the box when you were old enough so here it is. You may place anything you want in there and only you, to my knowledge, can access it. However there are a few things we need to do first. Place the box down there on the table, no closer to you. This ritual, if Ella’s instructions are correct, will ensure the box responds only to you; now hold your hand over the cavern, there’s a good girl...no your left hand Athenia, not your right; now just a little nitch in your palm...if those are tears in your eyes girl I’ll give you something proper to cry about; it didn’t hurt so stop being such a baby. Now, tip your hand over the box so the blood flows directly into it.”

Sure that any magic that involved blood was regarded as Dark Magic, Athenia felt apprehensive as the blood dripped into the box.

So therefore, Athenia nearly screamed when the blood that had dripped into the box began to glow red for a few minutes before gradually growing brighter and brighter until it was nearly blinding. In that moment when it was at its brightest Athenia thought she saw something, or someone, in the wood that made up the sides of the box; like a reflection. The taste of raw dark magic, acidic like, swept through the room throwing both Bellatrix and Rodolphus back into the

wall and pinning them there. Athenia however had never felt freer as the power and magic ran through her veins, as power exploded from the box, sending bright colours through the room; her mind filled with images and places that the box had been; the bright colours of India, its home place, she realised suddenly. The power that she was feeling was intoxicating as she saw faces of people who had owned the box before her, no, served the box...served? That was an odd word: after all it was only a box, she thought, but then the power intensified and Athenia screamed as an image of her mother, at sixteen, letting her blood flow into the box. This image was followed by one of her own, of a woman falling years ago as the killing curse hit her...the binding spell was coming to an end, Athenia realised though how she knew that she had no idea; having no previous experience with dark magic despite being brought up in a dark family.

Another image, this time of a dark haired youth with pale perfect features and stormy hazel eyes, being imprisoned in the box centuries ago shouting curses in various languages; no, she wasn't meant to see that, Athenia felt the box's apprehension as it pulled back. But Athenia, now sufficiently freaked out, yanked her hand away from the box just as the red light died down and the lid fit back on the top, neatly.

Athenia fell back on the floor, gasping as the taste of raw magic lingered slightly in the air while thinking over everything she had seen, and, more importantly, felt! Almost as if she was the box. The excitement at another person coming to the box, a young one; pure and innocent...Athenia just stared at the box, unsure what to do now, while fighting down the urge to be sick.

"Well Athenia," Rodolphus said into the silence that followed, "That's that. The box is now yours."

He had gotten up and after helping Bellatrix up walked over to the box and held it out for her.

Staring at the box Athenia was suddenly struck by a deep uneasy feeling of irrational fear for the box, scarily mixed in with a nearly overwhelming feeling of possessiveness. This man was holding her box! It was hers! But she couldn't snatch it back like she wanted to, or he

would flay her alive. Another voice at the back of her mind responded that it didn't matter; she was more than a match for her uncle. It didn't matter that she had no wand or learnt no spells...she could take him on and maybe teach him a lesson to get back at him for the punishments he had inflicted upon her at an early age.

The amount of hatred she felt shocked her back into her real state of mind and she took the box, stuttering her thanks as she felt the power stirring from within the box; as if waking from a long sleep.

"I understand if what happened frightened you Athenia; but remember the Dark Arts are not to be frightened of. They are to be embraced and twisted to suit your own needs..."

"Yes sir," and Athenia was shocked to find herself so close to tears.

"Good. Now go and put that in your room and we will meet in the hallway so we can go get your things for Hogwarts. Bellatrix, if you can go get Lyra and Aleric? Good, now run along girl."

Athenia ran off and Rodolphus watched the girl go, his own apprehension about his decision already beginning to affect what pathetic excuse for a conscience the man had.

"Do you think it was wise Rodolphus, to give the girl the box?" Bellatrix asked her husband. Said husband bristled and glared at Bellatrix,

"I hope my dear, that you are not questioning my judgement."

Bellatrix merely sneered at her husband and flounced off towards the door,

"Bellatrix!"

Bellatrix turned round, her dark eyes narrowed at her husbands attempt to control her,

“Aleric and Lyra?” he prompted. Bellatrix nodded and left Rodolphus alone in the vast room, slamming the door behind her as she made her way towards Lyra’s room.

At eleven years old Lyra was the exact replica of her mother though without the heavy lidded eyes. However unlike her mother she was into girley things like makeup and hair things, where as Bellatrix was more into eliminating people who she didn’t agree with.

Bellatrix saw Lyra as a weakling, a girl who would allow her whole life to be dictated by men. Although Bellatrix had gotten married, it was only because of her duty towards her family and furthering the Black lines; Rodolphus rarely tried to control her, knowing it was futile. However Lyra was constantly after her father’s approval, and Bellatrix had a feeling she would be the same with whatever husband she was chosen.

Aleric, however, was the exact opposite. He had his father’s looks and his mother’s power attitude; his iron determination and willpower, mixed in with the cruelty and leadership he was so good at naturally made him popular in the Slytherin common room and, from what gossips were saying in Bellatrix’s social circles, a fine catch for unmarried pureblood girls. The contrast naturally made Aleric the more favoured out of the two of them.

“Your father wants you in the hall now,” Bellatrix snapped at her daughter. Lyra held back a flinch at her mother’s tone and nodded, placing down the brush and getting up.

Bellatrix didn’t wait to see if she got to the door as she made her way further down the hallway towards Aleric’s room.

Knocking on the door Bellatrix waited until she heard her pride and joy call for her to enter.

“Come in.”

Opening the door Bellatrix saw her son in the corner, reading a book on potion making. At fifteen Aleric had dark brown hair, striking dark grey eyes and a thin lithe frame. He wasn’t good looking as such, but

he was striking to look at. Looking up Aleric arched an eyebrow in question.

“Your father wishes your presence in the hall so we can get your school supplies,” she supplied.

Aleric stood up and stretched, before throwing his book onto the chair which he had just vacated.

“Come along then mother,” he replied, holding out his arm for his mother gallantly. Then, when she took it, he escorted her down towards the main fireplace that was used for daily floo use.

Ascending the last stair he saw that his father was already there with his sister, who was looking as cool and detached as ever, and Athenia who was looking...angry; Angry and scared in equal measure.

“Are we all here then? Very good; Lyra, you first.”

Obediently Lyra took a handful of floo powder from the small pouch that Rodolphus held out. Stepping daintily into the fireplace Lyra yelled,

“Diagon Alley!” while dropping the powder. A flare of green flames rose up and Lyra was gone.

“Athenia?” Aleric noticed Athenia take a handful, noticed she hesitated before climbing into the fireplace. But what did unnerve him was the dark glint in her eye as she yelled,

“Diagon Alley!”

And she was gone.

Rodolphus held out the pouch to Aleric who took his own handful and dropped it, yelling his destination.

After the usual feeling of being sucked down a plug hole, the whirling and spinning, Aleric flew out of the fireplace and, due to years of practice, landed on both feet in the Leaky Cauldron.

A couple of second year Slytherins were in the corner, glancing over at him giggling. Aleric decided to humour them and sent a flashing smile in their direction; making the brunette go pink.

His mother appeared just behind him and he turned his full attention on her as his father appeared.

“Shall we go?” he said rhetorically before walking towards the back of the pub, ignoring the bar man’s tentative greeting, but managing a sneer towards what looked like a muggle couple with an eleven year old daughter.

Getting outside Rodolphus tapped the wall with his wand and all thoughts of the box and its contents flew out of Athenia’s mind as the world of Diagon Alley came into view.

After making a withdrawal from Gringotts Rodolphus said that they would split up.

“Aleric, you take the girls to get your robes while Bellatrix and myself will get everything else. We will meet you at Ollivianders?”

“Yes father.”

Then her uncle and aunt were gone, lost in the swarming crowd of Diagon Alley.

“Come on, and don’t get lost because I’m not coming to find you if you do.”

After stopping a few times so Aleric could speak to members of his peer group they entered Madam Malkins. Athenia felt a memory tug in the depths of her mind, but she pushed it away as Madam Malkin ushered her up onto a stool, waving her wand around so pins flew dangerously close to her face.

“Aleric, do you think father will buy me a cat?” Lyra asked her brother, who was examining a pair of dragon hide boots.

“Mother doesn’t like cats,” he replied, looking at her in the same intimidating way he looked at every first year to gain their respect and fear, “You know that.”

“Yes,” Lyra was persistent, ignoring her brother’s look, “But if I’m taking it to Hogwarts then it’s hardly in her way...”

“Lyra,” Aleric’s voice was dangerous, a perfect mimic of his father’s angry voice, “shut up before I shut you up myself. Father won’t buy you a cat and that’s that.”

Lyra’s face turned into a perfect pout but she did shut up, allowing Madam Malkin and the assistants to take measurements and adjust the robes to fit her.

“That’s you done, miss,” an assistant spoke to Athenia who took off the robes and jumped down, allowing Aleric to take up her place.

Noticing her look of concern as the pins flew close to his face he smiled reassuringly at her, causing Lyra to scowl. Aleric’s relationship with Athenia was much better than his relationship with Lyra: always had been since they were children.

“There you go miss,” Madam Malkin spoke to Lyra who, like her cousin, jumped down and joined Athenia in the corner.

Next to Lyra Athenia always felt plain. Her chestnut brown ringlets clashed with Lyra’s coal black curls and her violet blue eyes were the complete contrast with the smoky grey eyes that Lyra had. While Lyra was slim and willowy Athenia was just skinny. The contrast always made people see Lyra before they saw Athenia. This naturally made both girls rivals. Then, a small evil voice in her ear, a voice that had been there ever since she had hidden the box at the bottom of her wardrobe, spoke,

But it doesn’t have to be that way.

No it didn’t, but Bellatrix, despite her dislike for Lyra, would never allow her niece to take what Lyra could have; and when it came to

pure blooded men Bellatrix would make sure that Lyra was the first one in line.

Why should she? She's a weakling who can't think for herself!

Athenia shook her head to get rid of these traitorous thoughts, shocked at the amount of hatred within her.

"Athenia, are you alright?" Aleric asked.

Looking up at him she tried to manage a smile and a nod.

"Just...thinking," she replied.

"About what?" Aleric asked, curious to what was bad enough to bring the look of utmost hatred onto his usually kind cousin's face.

"I...I was just worried I wouldn't get into Slytherin..." Athenia stuttered, saying the first thing that came into her mind.

Aleric shrugged and said immediately,

"You will." Then, seeing the look of fear on her face, added, "Our family have been in Slytherin for centuries. It's impossible for you not to be."

Athenia nodded, feeling guilty for the small lie.

Aleric however didn't notice as his robes were done and he was now counting out enough Galleons from the small pouch his father had given him.

"Come along then," he said to the girls while walking out of the shop, fully expecting them to follow. Athenia did, happily, and was even happier when Aleric took her arm in his leaving Lyra out, ignoring his sister's death glare.

However he let go as soon as he spotted Richard Avery and Kaevan Selwyn standing in a corner, talking. Ignoring Athenia's hurt look he snapped to the two girls,

“Stay here.”

And he was off, talking to the two members in his dormitory. Before long the boys were in a deep discussion about Quidditch, leaving the girls a few feet away.

Lyra looked towards the pets emporium opposite with a longing in her face, which, as if became evident Aleric wasn't leaving any time soon, soon turned into a look of determination that was eerily similar to Bellatrix's look when she was adamant about something.

“I'm going to get a cat. Father won't mind.”

Athenia looked at her in a cocky way,

“You don't have any money,” she pointed out.

“Doesn't matter; I'll just send it to the vault...besides Father won't want me to be different in the Slytherin common room, will he? I mean everyone else will have some pet of some sort; I heard Pansy saying she's going to take her tabby cat so...”

Then, her mind made up, she set off towards the pet emporium.

Torn between waiting for Aleric to finish his conversation and going after Lyra, Athenia finally gave in and ran after Lyra who was already inside the shop. The shop was filled with croaks, meows and caws. Strangely it wasn't full so Athenia had no problems getting over to where Lyra was gushing over a cream Siamese with a narrow face, and who seemed to be glaring evilly at both girls.

“I want that one-“ she pointed to a beautiful Siamese before turning to Athenia, “What Pansy can do, I can do better.”

“Uncle Rodolphus won't be pleased Lyra...” Athenia warned, stunned, but slightly impressed, at her cousin's impulsiveness and lack of concern for what she saw was a blinding truth. Her uncle wouldn't take kindly to be taken advantage of in this manner.

“Father will understand,” Lyra replied, fooling herself with the idea that her father would over ride any objections her mother would have,

“Here you go ma’am. That will seventy galleons,” the attendant said, making Athenia seriously concerned for her cousin’s well being.

“Please charge it to the Lestrangle Gringott account.”

“Certainly ma’am.” The witch waved her wand over the till and smiled as she handed Lyra the Siamese in a basket,

“I’ll carry him,” Lyra announced, taking the cat out of the basket.

Athenia was stunned at her cousin’s stupidity,

“Lyra I don’t think...”

“Shut up Athenia, no one asked you,” Lyra snarled before flouncing from the shop; ignoring the shocked look on the attendants face and Athenia’s apprehensive one.

Taking a deep breath Athenia grabbed the basket and hurried after her cousin who was already outside, fighting with the cat who had taken a fright at the hustle and bustle and was trying to get loose.

“Put him in here...” Athenia snapped, taking off the lid of the basket so Lyra could shove the cat in.

“Owe!” The cat had scratched Lyra across the face, leaving three angry welts down her cheek. In her shock she dropped the cat who took off up the street at a run.

“Chanson!” Lyra called, having already named him mentally, and took off at a run after him, pushing and shoving her way through the crowd after the cat.

Athenia could have turned away then, walking towards Olliviners; told her uncle and aunt that she tried to stop her cousin from buying a very expensive cat and then came back to tell her uncle rather than

gone after her and how sorry she was that she had run off from Aleric and that it would most defiantly not happen again.

However she didn't do this. Instead, Athenia ran after her cousin; shoving and pushing past people who were coming in the opposite direction, ignoring their cries of protests.

They had reached the Leeky Cauldron and Chanson had run through a hold in the back door and through the pub, Lyra behind him though not close enough to grab him, and Athenia only a few feet behind her.

Chanson ran straight across the pub and through another hold in the front door, small enough not to be a problem but big enough for a skinny cat to squeeze through.

Lyra let out a small shriek and ran out, into muggle London. Wondering if her cousin was insane Athenia ran after her. She had got half way down the street and for a moment wondered if she had lost Lyra before seeing her on the opposite side of the road.

Running out Athenia was nearly hit a few times by a massive metal thing with wheels that let out a loud noise.

Ignoring them Athenia ran over to the other side and followed her cousin further into muggle London, shouting to her cousin.

"Lyra it's only a cat! Leave it! Uncle Rod will get you another one! Lyra!"

Lyra either didn't hear over the noise of the road or chose not to hear as she followed the cat into what looked like a large park. The cat ran up a nearby tree and Athenia stopped behind her cousin, breathing heavily as Lyra tried to coax the cat down.

Doubling over to ease the stitch that was in her side Athenia straightened up as a muggle man passed and remarked,

"You'll have a hard time getting that cat down lass."

Lyra ignored him, though Athenia paled. She had never seen a muggle before, let less been in muggle society. Having had a very sheltered upbringing, only hearing about muggles from her family, Athenia had envisioned a half human being with tentacles. The man who was smiling at them looked like any other human being, with the exception of his clothes. His hair was a nice tawny brown with bright blue eyes. It was at that moment that the enormity of what they had done, coupled with where they were that hit home.

Lyra had started to climb the tree now and Athenia decided enough was enough and dragged her down, swinging her cousin around so they could talk face to face.

“Are you mad? Do you know what you’ve done?” Athenia hissed, “It is a cat! A stupid cat! And Look where we are? Lost!” Her voice had raised an octave as hysteria threatened to take over, “Lost in muggle London!”

Lyra just surveyed her with those cold grey eyes,

“Did it ever occur to you that I know my way back? Or that you didn’t have to follow me?” she replied coolly.

“Do you?” Athenia replied scathingly, her temper beginning to get the better of her, “Do you know what uncle Rod will do to us when he realises we’re gone? He’ll...he’ll...”

“He won’t do anything because we will go back, once I’ve got my cat down, and go to Ollivianders and calmly explain that I walked into the shop, bought a cat and when we came out Aleric, who had been talking to his friends and who had abandoned us, had disappeared leaving us alone and lost in a street that we have only been to twice before. Then we will get our wands and go home, and Aleric will get in trouble. If you don’t want to get thrashed alive you’ll follow me in this.”

Athenia looked at her cousin, half impressed at her cunningness and half aghast that she thought she could actually pull this off. Aleric was the jewel of the Lestrange family. Rodolphus punished his heir himself, and even then it was only for offences that he was unable to

overlook. To try and blame Aleric would be suicide if they were caught!

“Lyra...”

“I need to get my cat,” Lyra hissed.

That cat! That bloody cat! The cat that had got them into this mess, though when it became apparent Lyra wasn’t budging without it Athenia joined in trying to call it down.

“You know I can phone the firemen, if it would help?” it was the muggle man again, pulling a small brick looking device out of his pocket and showing them. Athenia just looked at him blankly, having no idea what he was talking about.

“Call the firemen,” the man repeated slowly and loudly, as if both girls were rather slow; and waved the device in front of them to get the point across.

Athenia took a step back as the fear set in, becoming more real as each second passed. They were in a muggle environment! Around muggles! Her uncle would be furious! Lyra’s plan would never work, her aunt was a skilled Legilimens; she would see through the lie in seconds.

Again a memory pricked but Athenia couldn’t recall anything. Taking a step back Athenia shook her head while backing away, grabbing Lyra and dragging her with her; ignoring her protestations.

The man, who was looking at them oddly, probably knew they were witches, Athenia thought irrationally, and that thing he had was probably a witch hunting device...or something to kill them with at least.

“Lyra, can we please go back now,” Athenia whispered to her cousin urgently.

“My cat...”

"You can get another one," Athenia was near tears now from fear.
"Come on."

The man was now looking at them in a concerned way, his attention mostly fixed on Athenia and her terror stricken face as she gazed at him.

"I'm not going to hurt you..." he took a step forward towards them and Athenia let out a small scream.

"What's going on here?" Two more muggles had come up, a man and a woman; each wearing black trousers and a white shirt with a helmet of sorts. To Athenia's mind they looked thoroughly ridiculous. It never occurred to her that two eleven year olds dressed in dresses that would not have looked out of place in Victorian Britain were the ones that looked odd.

"I don't know officer...these two girls were after their cat...and then they started talking about being lost..."

"I see. If you can come with me girls, we can contact your parents..."

Athenia snatched her arm away,

"My parents are dead," she snapped, trying to fight the tears that came to her eyes though after everything that had happened she was fighting a losing battle.

Lyra herself was staring at the two uniformed people with fear etched deep into her face, edging closer to Athenia.

"Let's go," Lyra hissed in her cousin's ear.

"We've got to go..." Athenia started.

The woman in the uniform stepped forward and took each girl in a firm grip.

“We can’t allow you two girls to go running round the streets of London alone. It’s going to get dark soon and you don’t want to be on the streets when that happens.”

“We can get home easily....honestly!” Lyra’s voice had risen considerably as she struggled, though Athenia had given up. They had been caught and there was no way they were going to get home now.

A small tear slid down her cheek as she allowed the woman to guide her towards a blue and white big metal thing with wheels.

The woman opened what looked like half of one side which was on hinges and helped her in while talking though Athenia had no idea what she was saying as the fear had blinded her to everything around her. Lyra was shoved in after her, and it was as the door closed that Lyra stopped fighting.

As they began to move Athenia looked out of the glass, wondering if she would ever see her family again; or her home for that matter. As London flew by Athenia shed one more tear for her brothers but consoled herself with the fact that whatever they were up against she had Lyra with her.

Hehehe, a cliffy. The more reviews I get the quicker I'll update; thanks.

Chanson-means song in French

Athenia stared out into the vast gardens of Lestrange Manor resentfully; the weather was gorgeous and her cousins, and brothers, were taking advantage of this by being outside flying or running around playing depending on their age.

Athenia herself had been confined to the house until September after the events regarding muggle London. It could be worse, she thought reasonably. Lyra had been confined to her room; her food being brought up to her. Thinking back on those events brought a feeling of bitterness to her stomach.

After they had been picked up they had been taken to a large building with 'Police Station' engraved into a large bronze plaque on the side, they were left in a small cell with the door open as the muggle woman went to contact what she call 'Social Services'. That had been after they had asked and asked for their 'Phone number', whatever the hell that was. Because Lyra had remained mute the whole time Athenia had had to tell them she didn't know what a phone was. At first they had thought she was having them on until they realised she was telling the truth and grew concerned, deciding finally to contact "Social Services." Leaving them in a cell with a sandwich and a metal can they had sat there in silence, slowly accepting their fate until a loud pop in the room came and her uncles appeared, Rabastan holding a small round glass object. Their faces were both stark white from fury.

After apparating home Lyra tried to blame Aleric and Bellatrix, as Athenia had predicted she would, delved into their minds to see if what she said was the truth. As Athenia had been opposed to the whole shambles she was given a lighter sentence; but the theft from the account, the lose of the cat, integrating with muggles, lying and trying to blame Rodolphus's heir...well lets just say that Athenia could hear Lyra's screams long after she herself had been sent to her own room in disgrace.

They still had about a month of staying in the house and it was driving Athenia mad! If the weather had been terrible then she might have been able to bear it. But no, the weather was getting hotter and hotter by the day. Someone up there probably had it in for her...probably

her grandfather; disappointed that she wasn't like her mother....her mother! The box!

Athenia jumped up from her place on the window seat and made her way towards her wardrobe, rummaging about at the bottom until she found it pushed against the corner right at the back.

Pulling it out she was once again struck by how unremarkable it was before the happy feeling that had nothing to do with her filled her heart. The possessiveness that came whenever she held it...putting the box quickly on the floor she opened it and looked in, wondering how to get down there.

She wouldn't be leaving the house, she reasoned, she was just going into a box in the house...but how? The box was way too small for her to fit herself in. Biting her lip as she considered the problem Athenia looked the box over carefully but could find nothing that would make it enlarge...maybe she needed an enlargement spell placed on it, before she remembered what it was and mentally smacked herself.

This was a dark object! Obviously it had dark magic in it and her uncle had said not to be frightened of them, but to embrace them...and having grown up in a dark family she knew that the dark arts were flexible and more often than not, not what they seemed. Could she climb down? There was a ladder against the wall of the box that led down into the cavern...cautiously she stood up and placed her foot toe first into the box and was surprised when her foot hit a rung, feeling secure; and slightly fearful when she looked down and saw that her foot had shrunk considerably. Feeling more confident she placed a hand down and held onto the top rung, fighting down a thrill of fear as she placed her other foot next to the one already in the box before lowering her whole body into the box.

What spells were on the box she had no idea but it couldn't be too bad, could it? She wasn't hurt. As she climbed down the cavern got bigger and bigger though torches lit the walls, burning brightly; it was also pleasantly warm inside.

Reaching the bottom Athenia looked up and saw that the top of the box was like a big hole before turning her attention around at the

various things stored. Another thrill of excitement went through her which seemed to be the box rather than her. How she knew she had no idea, but it was addictive and Athenia moved further into the main area rather than the stone corridors that led off as it was here that there seemed to be piles of things.

After some investigating, Athenia found that most of the boxes contained books: some school things and some big dusty albums on the dark arts. Not completely interested in these Athenia passed them by until she spotted another box filled with leather bound diaries.

Her interest perked Athenia picked up the first one and blew away the dust that had settled on the top.

Opening it up she read the first entry,

Dear Diary,

Rodolphus and Rabastan are home now from Hogwarts and come September, I'm going as well. Only Rod's friend, Jason Rivers, is staying with us this holiday as his parents are away at a conference. When he's at home Rod's usually fun but now that Jason's over they spend loads of time in his room and when they don't they play one on one Quidditch outside.

Anyway Cissy's coming over on Friday until Sunday which is alright. However I know all she'll want to talk about is Jason as I've heard mother and father taking about what a good catch he is: pureblood right back till the twelfth century, only child and heir of the River's vast fortune, good looking and top of the year with good prospects for the future.

I mean, yes alright he's good looking and charming...towards mother and father. To Rabastan he is condescending and to me...well he treats me like a baby! And that is only when he speaks to me, which is hardly ever!

All my love Ella

Facinated by her insight into her mother's thoughts when she had been her age, Athenia read on.

Dear Diary,

Cissy came over today and, as I thought, she is obsessed by Jason! She can't stop talking about him and although I admitted I thought he was good looking she jumped on that and keeps teasing me about how I fancy him. He's my brother's friend! That's like Cissy admitting she like Rodolphus...its just wrong! But no, she's told me that although Jason is a good catch she has her sights set on the Malfoy boy, another friend of Rodolphus's.

"You're only eleven!" I told her

"So? Better to pick who you want to marry earlier and hinting at your parents so they know, rather than let them hook you up with a complete stranger," she replied.

True.

Anyway the rest of the day was spent doing hair and nails. Mother was running around like a headless chicken as she is hosting a ball next Friday...a Summer ball which is also supposed to be my coming out ball for pureblood society; Cissy was constantly talking about what she was going to wear, alternating every now and then as she changed her mind.

"Mother is taking me to get a new outfit," I informed her. Cissy's porcelain doll face looked interested,

"Really? I wish mother would take me shopping for a new outfit...I shall ask her when I next see her," she concluded, "After all mother would be the first one to understand that anything less than the best would shame the family."

Athenia flicked through the next few entries which were all about what she and 'Cissy' had done. Athenia wondered who Cissy was, having never heard the name, until she reached the entry for her mother starting Hogwarts.

Dear Diary,

I started Hogwarts Today! Rabastan told me all the way to Kings Cross that I was going to be in Gryffindor or Hufflepuff until Jason, who we were taking with us, told Rabastan to shut up and stop teasing me; then, he smiled at me in the most charming way before saying,

“I’m sure Ella will do her family proud and get into Slytherin. Besides, what other house is worthy of one with such good blood?”

My father had smiled, a rare thing; and mother had seemed delighted by this. Getting onto the platform Jason had thanked my parents for their hospitality while Rod and Rab had shook father’s hand and given mother a brief kiss on the cheek and a slight embrace before going off to find their friends, Jason included.

Father had then turned to me,

“Make me proud Isabella.”

“I will father,” I promise.

Mother takes me in her arms and gives me a brief embrace,

“Stay close to your brothers and follow their lead. Don’t interact with mudbloods or blood traitors, keep you marks up and always remember that you are a Lestrangle first and Isabella last,” father carries on as she releases me

“Yes sir.”

“Good.”

After finding me an empty compartment and placing my trunk on the overhead luggage compartment my parents bid me a final farewell before apparating away.

I close the door and sit back waiting for the train to move, sneering at the families who are giving big tearful goodbyes. The door opens and Cissy walks in,

“Finally, Hogwarts!” she gushes, making me laugh while taking a seat opposite me.

“Where is your cousin, Sirius?”

Cissy makes a dismissive gesture,

“In a compartment with about four other boys...who cares, we are going to Hogwarts at last!”

Her excitement is infectious and I smiled at her. Then the door opened and a red head and a black haired, hook nosed boy stood in the doorway looking at us.

“Do you mind if Severus and I sit here?”

Raising n eyebrow I nodded while trying to think which family they could belong to.

They sat down, the boy next to Cissy who viably moved away from his greasiness and the girl sat down next to me.

“Hello, I’m Lily Evans and this is Severus...we’ve just come from a compartment filled with four boys...rude obnoxious gits that they were.”

I send Cissy a sly look,

“There wasn’t a black haired, dark eyed boy among them was there?”

Cissy just glared playfully at me before turning to Lily,

“Evans? I don’t think I’ve heard of that surname before...you aren’t related to Utopia Evans are you? Maker of the recent Cleensweep 7?”

The girl looked blank, but the boy jumped in.

“Yeah! Yes she is.”

Cissy leaned back, looking half contented. It put my mind to rest to as I hadn't wanted to share a compartment with a filthy mudblood.

“What about you though? What family are you from,” I asked the boy.

“My mother was a Prince,” he stated making my eyebrows raise high up my forehead. The Princes are a highly respectable family that go way back.

“And your father?” Cissy asks suspiciously.

“Which house do you want to be in?” Lily had jumped in, rather rudely considering who she had interrupted. Never the less I humoured her,

“Slytherin of course,” I had replied

“Severus wants to be in Slytherin...I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad; and Gryffindor...where the brave dwell at heart...” Lily murmured, thinking.

“Gryffindor is full of mudbloods and blood traitors like the Potters,” Cissy replied scornfully, “And Ravenclaw is just filled up with boring half bloods who only read.”

The girl looked confused,

“What's a mudblood?” She asked, and before I could say anything the door opened and a voice cut through.

“What's this then dear sister?” Rodolphus was in the doorway along with Malfoy, Cissy's older sister Bellatrix, and Jason Rivers, “someone asking what a mudblood is? Don't you know that only filthy mudbloods themselves ask such a stupid question?” he had directed the last question towards Lily who had shrunk back.

“What do you want Rod?” I had asked.

“Just checking up on you little sister...and I am glad that I did. The company, with the exception of miss Black, is appalling.”

“Lily is related to Utopia Evans,” I snap at him, “The maker of your pride and joy.”

Honestly, could he act any more like an idiot.

“No, she isn’t. Utopia Evans is an unmarried mudblood herself. You can’t be related.” I look at him and realise that he, and all the others, have changed into their Slytherin robes; His blond hair, casually brushed back, makes his dark robes all the more flattering and brings to attention his prefect badge.

“Cissy I can’t believe you would sit with a mudblood...” Bellatrix starts on her sister but is cut off by Malfoy,

“I don’t believe Bellatrix that either girl knew who they were sitting with, which, as Rod rightly pointed out, is a good thing that we came along.” His drawling voice grates on my nerves though I keep my face neutral, turning to Lily who was looking bewildered by all this and Severus who had kept determinedly silent,

“Well? What’s your blood status?” I ask harshly.

“My parents are non magic if that is what you mean,” she bit back and I jumped away from her as if she’s burnt me. Imagine, diary, me sitting with a filthy mudblood!

“And you let me, us, sit with you; contaminating us with your filthy blood,” I snarl.

The girls’ face goes as red as her hair, an interesting colour I must admit.

“My filthy...”

“Ella, get your things and leave. I’ll deal with the mudbloods.”

Obediently I did as Rodolphus said as I know father has asked him to write to him daily about my progression in Hogwarts. It would be a bad start if father knew I was consciously hanging out with mudbloods.

Rodolphus flicked his wand and mine and Cissy's trunk flew overhead, managing to bang Lily's head in the process and went out into the corridor.

I followed it with Cissy behind me, dragging them down the corridor, looking for another place to sit. Looking back I saw my brother advance into the compartment...

Athenia felt a twinge of pity for the girl who had incurred her uncle's wrath, as she could well imagine what he would do to her.

Flicking through Athenia read the various entries, most of them boring as it was only about school work and stuff. Her mother had gotten into Slytherin and as a reward her parents had sent her a large box of Honeydukes Chocolates...she stopped at another larger entry.

Dear Diary,

Forget about what I said before about Jason Rivers. He is the most talented gorgeous man ever... I was walking back from charms today when I saw him hex a couple of mudbloods in my year, Hufflepuffs I think. They broke out in painful looking boils and ran off, crying. Jason caught me looking and winked cheekily before going on his own way, walking with that arrogant stride.

I told Cissy exactly what I think of him and now she refuses to let up about it. She can be so annoying sometimes.

I saw him as he came back from Quidditch practice, his hair still wet from the showers...his robes were damp from the rain outside, making them cling closer to his body and, well lets say I wasn't the only one looking and admiring from afar...

Athenia slammed the book shut, not wanting to read what her mother had thought about her father. It was called personal life for a reason.

The rest of the diary entries was mostly lusting after her father from a distance, over emphasizing small things such as a smile or a wink. Cissy also seemed to be a major part of her life.

Getting bored with this Athenia placed it to the side and picked up another diary randomly from the pile, opening it at a random page.

From the date Athenia deduced that her mother had been sixteen when she had written this,

Dear Diary,

I'm sorry I haven't written in a while but I've got so much news. The first is Rod's and Bellatrix Black's wedding. You know I've told you that Rod was meant to marry that ugly cow Hera-

Athenia's eyebrows rose right up to her hairline

-but the thing is Bellatrix is carrying a baby and its Rods! Father is furious and Bella's father even more. Anyway, sorry I'll start from the beginning and tell you how we know its Rod's. Well, the Blacks had come over and Cissy and I were sitting next to our mothers, listening to the adults prattle on when Father mentioned a statue outside given to the family by Salazar Slytherin himself. Naturally Mr Black insisted on seeing it. It was as we were all walking down the garden that Cissy practically yelled,

"What's that noise?"

Father stormed through the hedgerow followed by Mr Black. Cissy ran after them and I followed, ignoring mother's yell for me to get back. I should say that before Rodolphus had offered Bellatrix a walk round the gardens, playing the 'perfect gentlemen'. Mother had complained that they had no chaperone but Mr Black had dismissed it, saying that his daughter didn't need one as she 'was a good girl'. Mrs Black had frowned but abided by her husband's wishes like a good wife. Anyway, as father rounded the corner with me and Cissy and Mr Black hot on his heels we saw Rod pushing Bellatrix up against a tree,

both stark naked doing...well I blush even as I write this as they were actually going the full way!

Mr Black let out a noise that sounded like an angry animal being let out of his cage and was ready to pounce before seizing his wand and blasting the two apart. He looked ready to blast Rod to pieces before father stepped in and grabbed Rod's ear, lifting him up from the floor solely by his ear lobe,

"Maybe Cygnus, we will be able to talk about this inside? Violette, if you could take Bellatrix upstairs I'm sure you will be able to find her something to wear?" He was talking as if he were talking about the weather, though his grip on Rod's ear did not lessen. He then turned to me and barked at me to take Cissy upstairs to my room. Not wanting to upset him further I obliged and Cissy and I watched from my window as Mrs Black apparated away with Bellatrix who now had a cloak draped over her, while Mr Black came storming up to the house with father and Rod in tow. Mother took up the rear, her face a deep shade of crimson.

The men didn't come upstairs though mother did,

"Narcissa dear, your mother wishes for you to go home while this mess is cleared up. You can use Ella's fireplace," she indicated my fireplace at the side and after a small smile Cissy disappeared...

Wasn't Narcissa her aunt Bellatrix's sister, Athenia thought, married to Malfoy? Yes, that would make sense as her mother would be the same age as Mrs Malfoy if she had lived. Athenia carried on reading,

...Mother then turned to me and told me how upset she was with me for disobeying her like that in the gardens and as a punishment I was to stay in my room until the next day with no meals, before flouncing out. The day passed slowly as you would expect and the next day at breakfast father announced that Rodolphus was marrying Bellatrix. Rod later told me it was the only thing that Mr Black would accept short of killing him on the spot. Only that left the problem of Hera Rosier, Rod's betrothed, so what did father do? Gave Rabastan up for the offering to make everyone happy is what he did. I never fully realised how cold my father could be. I mean, it wasn't Rabastan's

fault that Bellatrix was at it with my brother but like all good sons Rabastan did as father asked him too with little trouble even though I could tell he hated it.

It was only today, two weeks since the incident, that Mr Black made a firecall to father saying Bellatrix was pregnant, that the charm they used was blue, so now the wedding is to be brought forwards. Really I'm staying out of it all. Bellatrix and Hera coming to live under the same roof; I'm glad I'm going to Hogwarts come September. Father can sort his own mess out. Putting those two together is like putting a mudblood into Slytherin; you would think that father would know that but no; he's decided to hold a double wedding much to my disgust....father has somehow managed to keep all this from pureblood society...

The rest of the page was just Hera bashing, but Athenia didn't take it in. She had never known that her uncle was supposed to marry her aunt Hera, and that Rabastan was the loyal, family orientated younger brother; that Rodolphus would openly defy his father and that her mother had hated Hera...how many other secrets did the family have?

Evidently the child had been Aleric and Athenia wondered if her cousin knew how his parents came to marry. She decided that he probably didn't before the sound of her stomach brought her back to reality.

Picking up the diary as well as a few more she made her way towards the ladder and started to climb up, awkwardly. Throwing the diaries over the top of the ladder Athenia scrambled out and placed the lid back on the box, hiding it and all its treasures at the bottom of her wardrobe. Then, deciding that it was best, placed her mother's diaries under some robes which had fallen from the hanger.

It was just as she closed the door that she realised dark had fallen and one glance at the clock told her she would be late for dinner if she didn't hurry. So, dragging a brush through her hair and dusting herself down Athenia hurried downstairs to the dining room where she was given a sharp glare by her uncle for not changing her clothes as well as nearly being late; under any other circumstances she

would have quelled under the look. Now with the mental pictures in her head that her mother's diaries had painted, it was all she could do not to laugh.

Keeping her head bowed so he would think her suitably chastised she sat next to her brother, helping herself to some turnips when they came while wondering how much other dirt she could find regarding her uncles in those precious pages.

A month later, across the country near the sea, sat a small semi detached house which was situated next to a dentist surgery. In the house, which was cosy despite its smallness, an eleven year old girl sat in her room on her bed staring at a yellow parchment envelope in her hands.

The envelope had already been opened and, from the looks of it, her school things had been purchased as they sat piled in her grandmothers trunk in the corner of her room.

The girl herself was of medium height and average build. Her hair was a big brown load of bushiness and her chocolate brown eyes gazed at the letter nervously while her forehead was creased into a deep frown, as if she was thinking hard about something not pleasant.

A knock at the door brought her attention back to reality and she called nervously,

"Come in." The door opened and her mother walked in, smiling.

"Everything ready for September?" she asked cheerfully, closing the door while coming to sit next to her daughter on her bed.

"Yeah...mum, do you think..." the girl broke off, her face a mass of worries.

"Do I think what? What's wrong Mia?" her mother asked while wiping a strand of bushy hair out of her daughter's eyes.

"I'm...worried that...that I won't fit in."

“Well why wouldn’t you fit in? You have every right to be there as anyone else. If you didn’t have that right then why would they accept you?”

Mia stayed silent, remembering a tall boy with loose black hair and good looks, dressed in dark robes sneering at her in the book shop when she picked down a book on wizard genealogy.

“Dunno,” she mumbled as her mother brought her into a warm hug.

“You’ll be fine Mia; you’re a lovely girl. Just look at this as an opportunity to make new friends and learn new things; and like your dad said before: don’t forget to write.”

Mia smiled at her mum, reassured.

“I won’t forget mum.”

“Good, now get to bed. Early start tomorrow.”

The girl changed into her nightie before climbing into bed, determined to sleep well so that she could leave her old life behind with good memories before tomorrow when her new life would begin. As she drifted into sleep a smile appeared on her face as she thought of how much she could teach the wizards about what they called ‘muggle devices’; naturally they would be as eager to learn about her world as she was about their world. As she drifted into sleep the thought that maybe the wizards wouldn’t be interested never came to mind.

How about this one then? Like it or hated it? Please review and tell me. Thanks x

Platform nine and three quarters was buzzing with families saying tearful goodbyes, owls hooting loudly from their cages, raised exited voices from friends who were re-acquainting themselves after a long summer...Athenia took it all in from her place next to the window inside a compartment; studiously ignoring Lyra who was sitting opposite her talking to Pansy and Daphne who had just entered.

There had been no tearful goodbyes from her uncles and aunts; more a very formal goodbye and a reminder of who they were and how they were to act and that, under no circumstances, were they to get into any other house other than Slytherin. The last whistle outside called and Athenia watched lazily as the students jumped aboard, waving out of windows as the train pulled away: ignoring the small tug at her heart at such an open show of affection.

Tearing her attention away from the platform Athenia turned towards Pansy who was now trying out different hairstyles while gazing at herself in a hand mirror.

"How was your summer Pansy?" she asked, more out politeness than anything as Athenia didn't really like Pansy. The Parkinson family were what was considered 'new money' and their pedigree didn't go back that far; about a century if anything. They had only recently been submitted into Pureblood Society. In addition to that she had a face that reminded her of a pug dog and dull short brown hair. However her father was the head of the Department of Mysteries so she would be a good contact for the future.

"Very good Athenia; mother and father took me to the South of France; father just bought a villa there...completely excluded..."

"Yes but Pansy, complete exclusion usually implies that that the occupants either can't handle society or that they are loners. Rarely does anyone in pureblood society wish to be in complete exclusion," Daphne cut in smoothly. Tall with long red hair and blue eyes she was a striking girl with a long pure blood history though to Athenia's mind she was a snob; much more suited to being friends with Lyra than her.

“Except mudbloods, of course,” Lyra put in while filing her nails, ignoring Pansy’s reddening face at the subtle insult given by Daphne. Both girls had always been rivals: Athenia found it petty.

The door opened and a girl and a boy stood there. The girl was small with bushy brown hair, brown eyes and large front teeth.

“Has anyone seen a toad? My friend here has lost one.”

Lyra let out a screech of laughter, closely joined in by Pansy. Daphne merely looked amused at the idea while Athenia kept her face schooled into a bored expression,

“A toad? Who would be sad enough to bring a toad to Hogwarts?” Lyra cut back maliciously, her eyes glinting dangerously as she spoiled for a fight. Her brother had his reputation in Slytherin already secure. Lyra decided to start early in the fear aspect. Respect would, of course, follow.

The girl looked taken aback by her venom, before recovering enough to snap back,

“There is no need to be rude. I was only asking...” but Athenia was no longer listening, her eyes fixed on the boy behind the girl. He had a slight fringe but it wasn’t enough to hide the lightning bolt scar on his forehead. Lyra and the others hadn’t noticed yet, more intent on putting the girl down,

“I don’t suppose you actually know anything do you? I mean, if you don’t know that no one brings a toad to Hogwarts then...then you must be either a stupid dirty half blood or a mudblood.” (Lyra)

“Excuse me?” (the girl)

“A mudblood: dirty blood. Proper termination for a muggle born.” (Daphne)

Throughout this Athenia had been staring at the boy behind her who had gone red with embarrassment and, if the glint in his eye was anything to go by, anger.

Before she could say anything to confirm her suspicions he tugged on the girl's robe sleeve and muttered,

"Let's go Hermione; now." It was more of a pleading than anything and Athenia narrowed her eyes in an assessing way.

"Filthy mudbloods shouldn't be allowed," Daphne muttered. Athenia resisted the urge to snap back at Daphne who the boy had been; instead she brought out a pack of exploding cards,

"Want to play?" she asked while shuffling them. Pansy scrunched up her nose but Daphne and Lyra agreed and the rest of the trip was spent playing various games such as exploding snap and as well as a few games of wizards chess, in which Athenia won every game.

In the end, as darkness was falling, Daphne knocked her screaming king down in disgust,

"Since when did you get so good?" Since when she had played constantly over the summer with her brothers; Damien especially was showing a cold calculating mind when it came to chess: knowing exactly which pieces to sacrifice in order to get to a more advantage position. Not that Daphne needed to know that,

"Inherited talent," she replied, ignoring Daphne's scowl.

Just then the compartment door opened, revealing Aleric with his prefect badge pinned to his chest.

"Get changed, we'll be there soon," he snapped before slamming the door and leaving. Athenia's face tightened in fury as she fought down the unexplainable anger that rose at her cousin's treatment of her: clearly he hadn't got over them getting lost in muggle London.

However she did as he said, followed by the others and soon the train screeched to a halt.

Bodies swarmed onto the platform and Athenia, closely followed by her cousin and co, walked over to a huge man who was shouting loudly 'Firs years. Firs years over 'ere.'

Standing in a small huddle the first years all gathered by the shore where they all got into a boat, Pansy, Daphne and Lyra sharing one with Athenia while the boy they saw before got in with the girl, a red head and a black boy with short cropped black hair. Athenia noted this with disinterest before the boats turned a corner and what she saw made all thoughts fly from her head.

Magnificence seemed too bland a word to describe Hogwarts. The turrets that rose up to the sky, the old stone works giving the huge castle a type of glamorous charm that lacked on so many old buildings; however age seemed to have matured Hogwarts rather than seeded it. In a way Hogwarts suited age as it made it all the more mysterious. But the sheer brilliance of it stunned every first year into silence, even when they had docked in the small cave under the huge castle.

Disembarking from the boats the first years followed the big man up some stone steps and through a door which led into a small room where a woman was waiting for them. She was tall with her grey hair pulled back into a strict bun. Her face reminded Athenia of her old tutor; someone who was fair but strict. She introduced herself as Professor McGonagall

"Now if you will all wait here please, I will go in and see if they are ready for you."

Then she left them all huddled in the small room,

"So," came a drawling voice that sent Athenia's hackles rising. Despite Draco Malfoy being Lyra's cousin and closest friend, as well as her cousin by marriage she couldn't stand the arrogant self assured boy. "Neville Longbottom comes to Hogwarts at last."

Athenia was one of the few who didn't murmur interestedly. The boy they had seen before turned a deep red. Draco, Athenia noted with disgust, pushed his way forward with Lyra hot on his heels.

“Malfoy, Draco Malfoy: and this is Lyra Lestrangle, my cousin” he introduced themselves while holding out a hand towards Neville, ignoring the girl, was it Hermione? Neville seemed about to reply before another arrogant voice flew over their heads,

“Nice names...if you like the star names in italics,”

Malfoy froze before turning round and smiling at Potter with a smile that was wintry at best,

“Indeed Potter...and what would a low life half blood like you know about it? Harry is such a common name, don’t you agree Lyra?”

“Indeed...of course, father talks about the Potters all the time; marring the family’s name by marrying filth, then becoming head of the most unwanted department since the Dark Lord was alive...”

“And your father would know all about ‘The Dark Lord’, wouldn’t he Lestrangle? Your mother too, from what dad used to say about her in his school days.”

“Don’t you dare insult my parents Potter,” Lestrangle snapped coldly in a perfect imitation of her mother’s coldest voice.

“Don’t call my mother filth then,” Potter snapped back, “But then I suppose it takes one to know one.”

Lyra looked ready to argue but any protestations were cut short by the re-appearance of McGonagall who gave them all a quelling look before saying curtly,

“They’re ready for you now.”

Athenia followed the rest of the students through the door and...a gasp caught in her throat as they entered the great hall: stars dotted the high ceiling which overlooked four long tables where students in black were already sitting in long rows. At the far end of the room was a high table and there, in a high gilded gold chair, was a man with a

long white beard dressed in bright orange and purple robes: and there right at the front of the high table was a small stool and a hat.

The first years huddled together at the side as the hat started to sing, though Athenia took none of it in as doubts filled her mind. Aleric had said that there was no way that she wouldn't get into Slytherin...but what happened if she didn't? Or what if she didn't get placed at all. Next to her Lyra had her eyes closed and was muttering Slytherin under her breath over and over again. Malfoy seemed to be doing the same.

After the song had finished McGonagall took out a roll of parchment and started reading off names. A few stuck out,

"Granger, Hermione."

The mudblood walked towards the stool and for a minute Athenia forgot her doubts as she watched her get sorted though why she was interested Athenia had no idea.

"RAVENCLAW!"

The Ravenclaw table burst into applause and Athenia immediately vowed not to go there. The majority of them seemed to be wearing glasses and looked to be the type that would marry books if it were possible.

Then...

"Longbottom, Neville!"

A hush fell on the great hall as everyone clamoured for a look at the Boy Who Lived.

It seemed to take some time with Neville until...

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

A silence...then the Hufflepuff table erupted into the loudest cheer yet as Neville made his way towards the table, a small smile on his face.

The Gryffindors were looking put out at this turn of events. Athenia allowed herself a smirk.

Lyra went straight to Slytherin and Draco followed. Potter went to Gryffindor and then...

"Rivers, Athenia."

Taking a deep breath Athenia stepped up towards the hat, still muttering Slytherin over and over under her breath.

The hat was placed over her head and she nearly jumped out of her skin when a small voice sounded in her ear.

"Well, well; another Rivers. Yes, I remember sorting your father: no other house for him except Slytherin...yes, yes I see ambition; Slytherin value ambition certainly...and courage; yes good for Gryffindor....Ah what is this I see? Cunning, yes, and subtlety...yes only one place really I can place you...SLYTHERIN!"

The last was spoken to the great hall and Athenia felt relief course through her body as the hat was taken off and she hurried towards the cheering table, returning Aleric's smile.

The rest of the sorting passed quickly and when the headmaster stood up to make a speech he only got Athenia's attention when he said,

"And please note that the fourth floor corridor is closed to all who do not wish to die a very painful long death."

Like everyone else Athenia stared at him, shocked. The he smiled and said some stupid words before clapping his hands. Instantly food appeared on the tables and Athenia marvelled at the amount.

After everyone had eaten Dumbledore stood up and sent them all off to bed, Athenia and the other first years following Aleric and a girl prefect; Katherine Selwyn, Athenia thought her name was, down into the dungeons; though long dank corridors and down various steps until they reached a blank stone wall.

“Pureblood.”

The wall dissolved and beyond Athenia could see a low lying stone room with long emerald green sofa and green armchairs. The Slytherin banner hung down from the ceiling and walls and a huge white marble fireplace took up most of the left wall. Immediately Athenia noted that the chairs by the fire were seventh year territory as they were all occupied by the seventh years themselves.

However slowly they all got up and Aleric and Katherine took a step back behind them as the seventh years stood in front of the first years with the prefects behind them. The common room fell silent to allow the Seventh years their due.

“You all have been sorted into the noble house of Slytherin,” a tall boy with a cruel mouth and hard grey eyes boomed out to them, successfully catching every first years attention, “Well done. As a result of the sorting you will be despised by the whole school, teachers and pupils alike so when you are out of the common room it is rule number one here to look out for each other regardless of personal feelings. If news of anyone breaking this rule gets back to me I personally will deal with the perpetrator. Snakes stick together and you have been placed in this house because of your blood, your ancestry, your ambition and your cunningness; traits that others both fear and despise.”

The boy, Avery, raked his eyes over the cowering firsties, revelling in his own power and their fear. He could see the Malfoy heir standing there, nervous but slightly arrogant which took him onto his next point,

“On that note when you are in the common room you are to respect your elders regardless of who they are. Respect and Obedience will be given! If a Seventh year wants you to do something, you do it with no questions asked or face the consequences. No snake will actively get you into trouble but if you get caught doing something you shouldn’t then you are on your own. No one will come to your aid. I don’t think I need to say, but I will anyway as it has been known to happen, though rarely, is anyone here not pureblood? And believe me, we have ways of finding out. All purebloods know the appropriate

protocol which is expected to be acted out at all times, and copying or imitating something which is taught from birth is easy to spot.”

Silence followed and Avery was about to continue when a small hand raised itself up into the air, stopping him.

The crowd of first years parted to reveal a skinny brown haired, tanned skinned girl with a nervousness about her that suggested she wasn't familiar with anything in this environment.

Avery locked his eyes with hers,

“What is your blood status girl?” he barked, a cruel steel edge in his voice.

“M...my what?”

Avery raised his eyebrows,

“Blood status! Your heritage! Half blood? Mudblood?”

“My...my parents...” she fell silent as Avery's eyes bore into her. Avery had had enough and delved into her mind, something he had learnt to do over the summer.

Images flew past and although they were nothing of much interest it told him what he needed to know.

“So, a mudblood!” he sneered, “The Slytherin Mudblood: Exactly what Slytherin didn't want.”

He grabbed the girl's arm and yanked her to the front.

“Every thing I said before does not apply to this girl,” he snapped to the other firsties, “She is a mudblood in Slytherin...the lowest of the low. Filth, scum, vermin...you have heard your families speak of such filth and here is one right in our mists which show, at the end of the day, that mudbloods can taint even the most purest of places.”

Avery threw the girl down on the floor. Athenia felt pity for the girl though she carefully concealed it. It wouldn't do to let Avery think she was a mudblood sympathiser, when she wasn't! As if in instinct she inched away from the girl on the floor, Lyra with her.

Avery smiled coldly at the gathering firsties.

"My first order to you all is to treat her as your parents would expect you to treat her and I don't need to spell that out for you." He held up his wand and pointed it at the girl on the floor. A flash of red and some pus like substance erupted from her nose. "Now," he changed the subject abruptly showing how unhinged his mind was, "It is an early start tomorrow so all of you get to bed. And again, welcome to Slytherin: Your journey towards greatness starts now." Then, ignoring the gagging girl on the floor, he walked off with the other seventh years. The prefects stepped forward,

"Boy follow Aleric and girls follow me," Katherine barked, ignoring the girl on the floor who was gagging painfully.

Athenia followed Katherine down some steps and towards a large door with Roman numerals on it,

"Your dormitory...I dare say you might be able to get extra points with the seventh years as you will be sharing a dormitory with the mudblood up there. If you can run her out of Hogwarts it will be a step in the right direction."

Then she was gone, leaving the girls to claim their beds. Athenia picked one in the corner next to Daphne as Lyra took the middle one with Daphne and Pansy one either side. Another girl, Millicent Bullstrode, who looked like a large troll, claimed the one in the corner leaving the bed between Millicent and Pansy open for the other girl.

Athenia was placing a picture of herself and her brothers framed in a simple silver frame on her bedside when the door opened and the mudblood walked in. Lyra was the first to react and Athenia saw the look of fear in her eyes. A memory sparked,

"Filth like that....just saying how it is!"

Hurt Emerald Green eyes, tears filling them...kindness, soft voices speaking soothingly to her...being held warmly by someone who cared...

Through the broken images Athenia managed to remember: remembered that day when someone had picked a frightened child up off the streets of Diagon Alley and took her home and contacted her relatives rather than left her as so many people in this world would have done.

The memory of the simple act of kindness burned bright in her chest however it quickly turned to shame as she heard Lyra's next words,

"Filthy mudblood needs to learn her place...how about you sleep on the floor by the door? That way when we get up and leave we can kick you on the way out."

Shame filled her and Athenia quickly turned round as her pale cheeks were stained with red. From the sounds of it all the other girls had gotten involved and Lyra's voice came drifting over to her,

"Don't you have anything to say to her Athenia?"

Athenia wanted to deny it, to tell Lyra where she could go. The words that left her mouth though just showed how sacred she was of defying what she had been brought up to believe; how ingrained into her head the notion of blood purity was,

"I have plenty to say, cousin; but what makes you think that as a Rivers, I need the dormitory behind me?" Athenia was still unpacking as she said these hurtful words, "Filthy mudbloods don't scare me; and I will get involved when the time is right."

Her tone was cold and flat, matter of fact and Lyra shrugged before turning back to her taunting and bullying.

Athenia didn't say anything to the girl for the rest of the night, even when she climbed into her bed Athenia allowed Lyra to shoot her down. As the lights were turned out Athenia thought again of the

woman who had helped her and unease settled in her chest as she drifted off to sleep.

Although the notion of blood purity was ingrained deep within her; had been beaten into her in some cases, the first crack had appeared in the once firm, solid resolve that family and blood purity were everything.

Outside a werewolf howled deep in the forest as another unicorn was slain; symbolising the first step towards the loss of innocence that would occur in Athenia Isabella River's life in the years to come.

Thanks guys, please review.

As Athenia came from a strictly pureblood background she knew that there was more to magic than waving a wand and saying a few words. It took concentration, mind power; and of course you had to know the theory. That was why she wasn't at all surprised when the first few weeks were spent solely on learning various theories as well as background knowledge on each and every spell.

This wasn't what annoyed her though. What did annoy her was that she and the rest of the Slytherins had most of their lessons with the Ravenclaws and that mudblood Granger seemed to know more about the wizarding world than she herself did.

However homework, standing up for herself against others and fitting in to the Slytherin common room took up most of her time. But when she wasn't doing work, or working the system in the common room, or standing up for herself against people in other houses, she found that one person especially raised her hackles more than Granger; and that person was Harry Bloody Potter.

It seemed that over night his popularity with the firsties had gone through the roof. If he had been sweet, kind and considerate she may have looked over it; but his arrogance matched Draco Malfoy's and it grated heavily on Athenia's nerves. Also, he seemed to have made it his personal mission in life to have a go at every Slytherin in existence. What he hadn't counted on though was that Athenia herself could give it right back. However with his little band behind him; the Black twins and the stupid gangly red head she was, more often than not, outnumbered.

However she seemed to have got back into her family's good books by getting into Slytherin. Her uncle had already written to both Lyra and herself telling them how pleased he was with them both and a reminder of whom they were and how they were to act. This, as far as Athenia was concerned, was an up.

But as the first few months flew by Athenia found herself spending what ever free time she had in her mother's box; the box that slowly was taking over her. What made it more interesting was that she had gained, much to Lyra's annoyance, a high position among the first years and even among some of the second years; merely by going

along with what the small voice in her conscience told her. Also she was learning a lot about her parents from the diaries as well, not to mention serious dirt on her uncles.

How she would use the information she had no idea yet but as she was fast learning in Slytherin, if you had information on someone it gave you an advantage. What it didn't tell you was how to use information against someone who sacred the living daylights out of you; aka her uncle Rodolphus.

However, a month into the school term a notice was put up on the common room notice boards informing the first years that they would have a flying lesson this coming Friday with the Hufflepuffs,

Next to her Lyra muttered,

"Great! The Hufflepuffs will just ruin it by being there; sops that they are."

"It could be worse," Athenia replied mildly, "It could be the Griffindors."

Lyra fell silent though she continued to glare at the piece of parchment.

Friday came quickly with Athenia making her way from the greenhouse towards the pitch, annoyed and disgruntled as, no matter how hard she tried she couldn't manage to grasp Herbology.

The Hufflepuffs were already there, having nabbed the best brooms first Athenia noted with narrowed eyes; the effects of the box from last night's session still in effect.

Athenia managed to grab a half way decent broom with Lyra snarling at the Slytherin Mudblood over a broom. The girl timidly handed it over and went over to one of the crappier brooms.

Madam Hooch appeared suddenly,

“Now, hold your hand over the broom and say in a nice loud clear voice ‘Up’”

Athenia did as she was bid though it took several tries before it flew up into her hand.

Next to her Neville Longbottom was forced to pick his up and Athenia suppressed a smirk. Some hero! Madam Hooch walked amongst them, adjusting their grip until she announced that they were to mount the broom, kick up into the air and hover before landing gently.

However, before anyone could carry this out Neville Longbottom, who seemed to have mounted his broom rather early, lost control of the broom as it rose higher and higher up into the air before speeding off towards a large tree on the outskirts of Hogwarts. Madam Hooch and the firsties ran after him, stopping and staring and yelling at the overhead figure.

To the surprise of all the first years the tree came alive and lashed out with it's branches at Neville when, clinging for his life, he flew too close. Most of them missed by inches until one particularly thick branch hit him hard in the stomach and Neville went flying off the broom, through the air and landed with a dull thud on the ground where he lay moaning in pain.

Madam Hooch was besides him in an instant.

“Broken wrist along with bruised muscles...however I think you'll best take a trip to the hospital wing to make sure it is nothing else...Miss Rivers, kindly escort Mr Longbottom to the hospital wing please. Stay with him until he makes a recovery.”

Stunned at being chosen randomly from a crowd of twenty Athenia stumbled forward and, after taking a lot of the chubby boy's weight, Athenia stumbled from the parting crowd towards the castle; muttering under her breath as soon as they crossed the threshold to the castle.

“I'm...s....sorry,” the boy next to her muttered; Hero or not she wasn't in the mood for any apologies. First flying lesson and she was

missing it because Neville bloody Longbottom had to play the centre of attention.

Reaching the great hall Athenia didn't answer as they ascended the stairs, panting now under his weight. They passed by Aleric with a group of fifth year Slytherins around him. They stopped to watch Athenia struggle with Neville up the stairs; Aleric raising his eyebrow.

Not in the mood for staring but managing a funny jerk of the head to show her deference, as she would be cursed stupid if she didn't, she waited until they nodded back and she carried on.

"What was that about?" Neville panted as they reached the floor to the Hospital Wing. Athenia didn't answer as she pushed open the door to the hospital wing and explained to a ruffled looking Madam Pomfrey what had happened.

Athenia was even more annoyed and insulted when the matron looked towards Neville for confirmation, as if she doubted Athenia's word.

Neville managed a nod before wincing. Madam Pomfrey ushered them to a bed and allowed Athenia to sit in a hard backed chair as she waved her wand over Neville's wrist before forcing him to drink some nasty looking bubbling purple liquid before hurrying towards her office intent of filing out an accident form.

Athenia sighed and flopped back into the seat as Neville finished the last of the potion.

"I'm sorry you were forced to come with me," he said into the ensuing silence.

Athenia shrugged but didn't answer, more uncomfortable with the sincerity in his voice than the actual apology. Stupid Hufflepuffs, she thought; they're too honest.

"Doesn't matter," she muttered, the lie echoing round the room

Neville stayed silent before offering,

“I’ll...I’ll make it up to you.”

“Oh? How?”

The news about the flying lesson would be around all the firsties and all she could say was that she had spent the afternoon sitting next to the Boy Who Lived, doing nothing. It was a depressing thought.

“I...I could help you with your Herbology?” he offered.

“I had no idea my bad Herbology marks were the talk of the first years?” she replied scathingly.

Neville coloured deeply but managed,

“I...I could help you improve your grade....and it’s not the talk of the first years....just madam Sprout said to me she wished your were more like me in Herbology...it kind of slipped out...”

Athenia bet it had. Convenient she was a Slytherin, she thought viciously remembering Avery’s words. How true they were. However she found her self replying,

“Will I have to pay?”

Even to her ears it sounded harsh. Neville himself winced before shaking his head,

“No...I...I said I’ll...I’ll...”

“Make it up to me, I know. Fine; every Friday then until I get the hang of the stupid subject...”

“That’s fine,” Neville managed, visibly cheered, “and in return you can tutor me in Defence as I’ve heard you are really good at it.”

“I thought this was a pay back,” Athenia replied, though secretly pleased that her skill had been noticed.

“Yeah...” Neville fell into silence and, suddenly, Athenia saw an opportunity regardless of the conditions of the offer,

“I’ll tutor you if you tutor me and for pay back in regard to the flying lesson you can spread about how much time we spend together.” The thought brought her a malicious delight as the thought of how her cousin would react came to mind.

“That’s fine...only I’m wondering if it would be better if we met on a Saturday. Gran likes me to study...” he broke off, colouring again.

Athenia ignored it and nodded,

“I will see you tomorrow at twelvish? We can study Herbology for a couple of hours before turning to Defence. My uncle will be happy,” she finished, remembering her uncle’s letter the other day in regard to her marks. He hadn’t been happy to say the least, comparing her to her mother throughout the whole letter.

Neville grinned,

“See you then,” just as Madam Pomfrey came out, ushering Athenia away who managed a small smile for her study buddy; If they were to study tighter, it would be better if they got on. Also it would reflect well on her, in her uncle’s eyes, if she got on with the Boy Who Lived. Adding a small skip to her step as she headed towards diner she allowed herself to divulge in the thought of her uncle’s pleasure.

Thanks guys, please review.

Athenia made her way towards the library quickly, her books held close to her chest as she opened the doors that led to the large dim lit room which housed hundreds of big dusty books

Athenia made her way towards the library quickly, her books held close to her chest as she opened the doors that led to the large dim lit room which housed hundreds of big dusty books.

Tables dotted about the room, only a few occupied; mostly by older students. Athenia walked on by, nodding towards a table of seventh year Slytherins; Avery amongst them. Hurrying past Athenia found the table where she had agreed to meet Neville and sat down, placing her books in front of her just as the door opened and Neville himself hurried through, his arms holding at least five thick volumes on Herbology.

Athenia raised an eyebrow at him as he dumped them in front of her,

“I thought these would be a good starting point,” he gasped, sitting down opposite her.

Athenia glanced at the titles,

A beginners guide to Magical Water Herbs

An Encyclopaedia of Magical Herbs and Fungus's

Magical Fungus and its properties

Healing Herbs and Killing Herbs: How to know the differences

A Muggleborn's first guide to Herbology

Athenia found she was insulted by the last title, but Neville was talking therefore preventing Athenia from saying anything,

“We'll start with this one,” he said, pulling out the Encyclopaedia from the pile.

The session didn't go too badly and Athenia found that Neville was a good teacher despite his initial quietness, while at the same time letting slip a few details about himself. He lived with his Gran, and had found, from an early age, that working with plants gave him a therapeutic sense of calm as the plants had no expectations of him other than the dependence of being watered, pruned and given the right kind of living conditions. Athenia felt she could sympathise. As the eldest daughter to one of the most purest families and, therefore, good marriage material, she was expected to act a certain way in every situation.

She was a Rivers first, Athenia second: a lesson that had been drummed into Athenia ever since she could remember. And, because she was a Rivers, it meant that she had to meet her uncle's standards on what was acceptable behaviour and what wasn't; and to an extent she resented it as much as Neville resented his unwanted fame.

She said as much before halting just as the words left her mouth, wondering why she trusted this boy whom she had only met a few times with such a deep dark secret. Neville looked surprised before saying, hesitantly:

"Maybe a bit of Defense now?"

If Athenia found out one thing it was that she was not born to be a teacher. She got impatient easily and snappy when Neville didn't grasp something immediately. But she did manage to calm down once he had grasped the theory of a few simple spells that they had learnt at the start of term, and even managed to let her guard down enough to have a bit of a laugh with Neville as they went over the Defence spells, unaware that a few feet away Avery and the other seventh years were watching the two firsties with growing interest.

"What do you think then?" Avery asked Jasmine Selwyn, fellow seventh year and older sister to Katherine,

"About what?" Jasmine answered sweetly, playing the stupid female as she knew it pleased Shayne if she did.

“About the Rivers kid,” Shayne Avery snapped at her, “What else you dumb bitch?”

Despite his insults she had been ‘his girl’ for the past year and she was hoping against hope that once they left school he would propose to her, securing her future and refusing to believe, and see, the truth in that he was only using her because of her blood and family connections and that, as an Avery, he had his sights set higher than a girl who’s family were going through financial difficulty.

“She doesn’t seem very interested in putting the mudblood in her dormitory down...”

“No! About Longbottom...”

“Her uncle will be pleased,” Jasmine replied carefully, “It will benefit her and her family if she befriends Longbottom...”

“Indeed?” Avery replied, stroking his chin thoughtfully while making a decision to keep track of the eldest River’s child. Although she was seven years younger than him she could prove to be a powerful ally and potential marriage material in the long run, if she befriended the Boy Who Lived. It would definitely help him in his ambitions for the ministry. However, there seemed to be a slight problem as Longbottom was known for hanging around with the wrong people. He would have to have a word in Lestrangle’s ear about warning his cousin about that...but what was happening? They seemed to be arguing...

“I don’t need to hang out with a mudblood lover, Longbottom. I’ll help you with defence but I’m certainly not helping a know it all mudblood like Granger.”

Avery raised his eyebrow at her loud voice. So far the girl had come across a quiet, obedient, slightly cold and reserved...everything required in a young pureblood girl.

But here he was speaking in a shrill loud voice and to none other than the Boy Who Lived. Didn’t the stupid girl know what good opportunity she was throwing away?

Longbottom said something to her and the redness in her cheeks turned up a notch,

“Fine! If that is how you feel then you can get along in Defense by yourself,” she spat venomously before hurrying from the library, ignoring the glaring librarian as she slammed the doors.

Shayne Avery narrowed his eyes at the girl’s stupidity. Of course, fraternizing with mudbloods was out of bounds; the girl’s uncles were close friends with his father and he knew how his father would feel on such matters, so it would stand to reason that the girl’s uncles would feel the same negativity towards mudbloods...but as it was a complicated situation as it regarded the Boy Who Lived...he narrowed his eyes further as the door slammed shut; seeing this and the girl as a challenge which he couldn’t back down from. Ignoring Jasmine entirely now, he pulled out a clean piece of parchment and, making up his mind, started writing.

Athenia stormed back to the common room and, throwing herself into a chair, realized that in her haste to leave the library, she had forgotten her books. Cursing and ignoring the death looks some fourth years sent her she decided she would wait until later to retrieve them. Right now only one thing could calm her down enough from Longbottom’s humiliating rejection as well as his offer of tutoring Granger...she was in the dormitory and, checking no one was around, climbed into it, shutting the lid down behind her.

The torches gave her a sense of security and the slight draught that was always there whipped around her ankles as she jumped down from the last rung, making her way towards the boxes that held her mother’s diaries. Despite reading them religiously she had found more diaries that began after she had left Hogwarts and was being courted by her father. Although Athenia skipped over the more revealing details she found the relationship her parents had shared fascinating.

It was as she was sitting down to read the latest diary that she noticed a shift in the corner and glancing up, swore she saw a shadow before it disappeared. Shrugging it off as a trick of the light

she turned back to the book before a colder wind blew through the cavern, making the flames in the torches dance, from an unknown location. It was then that Athenia looked up again and fear coursed through her veins at what she saw, standing in front of her.

He lay in wait in his prison, encased by the four walls that bound him in, knowing with a thrilling certainty that the child's addiction to him and his magic was growing stronger and that she would come again, back to his domain soon.

He glanced towards the corner from his place behind the stone, looking at the pile of books the child had amerced herself in. Sentimental stupid things they were, but if it kept the child coming back for more then he could live with it...he closed his eyes as he thought about her, the girl who would restore himself to his former glory: pure power, much more than she realised, ran through her veins; innocence and purity...he closed his eyes in ecstasy: freedom was so close he could taste it!

But he could wait as there was no point in rushing things. Centuries locked in this box by those blasted fools had taught him patience if nothing else; he would have gone mad otherwise. The fact that he was already mad never crossed his mind. But once he was free he could extract his revenge on the people of this age and, once he was back to his full powers, finish his plan for taking over the entire human race. Oh, he knew there had been others who had tried but, unlike him they had failed. The latest Dark Lord, Voldemort, had failed by a mere baby...he found himself disgusted at the mere thought.

Ella Lestrangle's blood, as well as the blood that belonged to the previous 'owners' of the box, still ran through the walls despite death. Through her blood he had access to her mind and the events that had surrounded her regarding the Dark Lord. However the child, Ella's child, she was different. Her mind was strong and her will even stronger if she but knew it.

The child could, and would, be used. The time was coming when he would tap into her power and use it; but to do that he would have to reveal himself to her, exhausting as that may be and gain her trust. Then, once she had completed the freeing from his bondage spells,

he would be free and the girl would be used to further his aims and, once she reached her sell by date, he would dispose of her; the details of his plan tweaked to perfection he smiled as he saw a familiar figure climb down into the box. He was even more intrigued as the child stormed over to her mother's diaries, muttering angrily under her breath about mudbloods and blood traitors. He watched for a while as she got absorbed in the books before summoning his powers and stepping through the wall into the cavern and slowly walking towards her, smiling at the shocked and frightened look on her face as he closed in.

So, what did you think? Review and tell me. I'll admit that this story is more darker than my other ones so I'm interested on the readers take on it. Anyway, like I said: review. Thanks x

Athenia stared at the oncoming figure, slowly and arrogant walking towards her with a blank fear-filled mind, for about two minutes before common sense and instinct kicked in and she ran. Ran across the cavern with its craggy stone walls, the smooth stone floor with its boxes and boxes of treasures left by all the past owners and towards the ladder.

It seemed to take hours to get to the top, which was in fact just minutes; finally reaching the top and climbing out awkwardly Athenia fell to the floor in an undignified heap before slamming the lid on the top of the box; as if a thin piece of wood would make all the difference.

Athenia edged towards the corner of the bathroom, sitting down on the floor while staring at the box as if it would bite. The box started to glow an angry red but after five minutes of doing nothing but glow Athenia's fear began to edge away to be replaced by anger and curiosity.

Who was that man and how had he gotten into the box? Was he part of it? Was it his voice she had been hearing in her mind? Possession maybe, as the Dark Arts had no boundaries?

Disturbed by this last thought Athenia decided not to go near the box for a while. But then she couldn't leave it here in the middle of the bathroom where anyone could pick it up. The thought of Pansy finding and keeping the box sent a wave of jealousy through her which had nothing to do with her personal feelings. Pushing it aside she cautiously edged nearer the box and levitated it with the levitating spell they had learnt in charms, levitating it out the door and into the, she was pleased to see, deserted common room.

Now the problem of where to hide it arose and Athenia spied the mudblood's bed in the corner; the bed clothes thrown all over the place and the curtains torn. No doubt Lyra's handiwork. Some pieces of curtain had fallen under the bed and Athenia levitated the box under the bed, throwing some pieces of curtain over it. It was a crappy hiding place but for the moment it would have to do as she wasn't having the box anywhere near her own bed.

Walking out of the dormitory Athenia found that there was something else on her mind and that something was Neville. Despite the boys outward nervousness his kindness had touched Athenia; not to mention he had actually wanted to hang out with her...also he had made her laugh at ordinary things and very few people could do that. Actually, she thought as she sat down in a green armchair in a secluded corner as she tried to gather her thoughts, only her brothers could do that...and the triplets, Rabastan's youngest children, but they were only five years old and still in the nursery; also, unlike her brothers, they were still young enough to not understand blood purity which had its added bonuses.

Shaking her head at her train of such traitorous thoughts she was surprised to feel sad about her argument with Neville as her mind played it over in her mind; one thing was for sure, remembering how she had yelled in Neville's face that she didn't need to hang out with a mudblood lover.

Her insides twisted with guilt as she remembered the shocked and angry look on her face before remembering that her books were still in the library. Thinking there was no time like the present to retrieve them she set off across the common room, moving around some chairs to avoid Aleric who was coming towards her, his face a funny shade of puce.

The corridors outside the common room were cold and damp and Athenia hurried through them and up into the main hallway, listening to the sound of diner finishing. Hurrying up the stairs towards the library she entered, stopping to allow her eyes adjust to the low lighting.

Many of the occupants were fifth years and up, all studying for their exams. Athenia moved around the tables to where she had been sitting, only to see an empty table. No books.

Holding back some explicate words she made her way towards the librarian who glared at the girl over her spectacles,

"Yes?"

"I left my book here a couple of hours ago...I was wondering if you had taken them in," Athenia asked.

"I haven't taken in any books that don't belong to the library."

"But maybe..."

"Enough! I said I haven't got your books so go. Out, now!"

After a final glare Athenia walked out and bumped into the last person she wanted to see.

"Get out my way Granger..."

Then, pushing her way past, her mood plummeted further when Neville appeared: a very awkward silence fell between them until Neville retrieved something from his bag.

"I've got your books...you left them in the library."

Athenia bit her lip before taking them as shame filled her again though she didn't show it.

"Thanks...Neville look..." she broke off as he turned towards her. Taking a deep breath she started again,

"I'm sorry for arguing with you before..."

"And for calling Hermione a you know what?"

"Neville look, I want to be your friend and I'm sorry if it upset you..."

"Yeah it did," Neville's round face looked angry.

"I just...I don't want to hang out with her..."

"Why? You don't know her..."

"My uncle wouldn't like it." There, she'd said it. Neville gave Athenia a pitying look before nodding,

“Alright then...we can start again I suppose...I mean you don't have to hang out with Hermione if you don't want to...”

Athenia's face broke into a grin,

“Great! How about tomorrow...we can start from where we left off...”

Neville'd face twisted up,

“No offence Thea, but maybe we should stick to Herbology as your not a very good teacher....”

Athenia laughed and Neville joined in.

“Tomorrow then, same time; Oh, Thea, one more thing,” Neville added hesitantly as Athenia made to walk back to the common room,

“Yeah?”

“Please don't use the you know what word again around me...”

Athenia took a deep breath before saying,

“I'll try...”

“That's all I ask,” Neville jumped in, his face breaking out into a small smile. Athenia returned it before bidding him goodnight and making her way downstairs towards the dungeons and the common room.

Her smile was wiped off when, as soon as she stepped into the common room, she was hit by a white light and pain burst behind her eyes as she fell down, screaming on the floor as a burning pain shot through her body; starting with her eyes right down to her toes.

Her eyes watering furiously she felt someone stand over her,

“Never Athenia, and I repeat never avoid me like you did before again. If I want to talk to you then you will wait and hear what I have to say regardless. Is that understood?”

The pain subsided and Athenia looked up into Aleric's furious face which closely resembled his father's. Around him were other fifth years, all glaring down at her.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled, wiping away the water from her eyes; pretending that they were tears as the older years tended to back off if they thought they had reduced you to such a state. Unfortunately, Aleric knew Athenia better than that, and another pain curse was delivered; this one more intense

"I'm sorry...I'm sorry!" she screamed through the pain.

"Stop pretending Athenia, or I'll write to father about your lack of respect for your peer group."

"No...please!"

The pain was lifted and Athenia lay panting at her cousins feet.

"Now," Aleric continued in a cold tone, "Get up."

Dragging herself up Athenia bowed her head in a show of deference to the older years which was received with stony silence, deepening her humiliation. What made it worse was that every one in the common room was watching, making her pale complexion flush deep red

"Now, what's this I hear about you breaking ties with Longbottom?"

"We...we argued earlier because he wanted me to tutor the mudblood Granger."

"And you refused?" Aleric's voice was soft and sinister.

"Yeah...but we've...we've made up now Aleric. We're meeting up tomorrow..."

Aleric gave his young cousin a cold smile,

“I’m glad to hear that you have some common sense in there,” he tapped her head sharply with his wand, before lowering his voice, “don’t let me or the family down.”

Then he was walking away, his small clique following behind him; leaving Athenia standing in the middle of the common room while the talk resumed around her, feeling humiliated and angry.

Walking purposely towards the dormitory to get away from the chatter, she was followed by Daphne and Pansy. Lyra followed a couple of paces behind. Everyone was silent until they got to the dormitory when Athenia threw herself onto her bed, fighting back the tears that threatened to fall, caused by her cousin’s cruelty. He was his uncle’s son in every way.

“Don’t dwell on it Athenia,” Daphne said carefully, sitting down next to her on the bed while the other girls sat on their own beds, watching Athenia carefully.

“I’m not,” her muffled voice came through the pillow, “He’s just a twat...”

“Maybe, but remember that we’ll be fifth years one day...”

“Yeah, suppose.” Athenia sat up and glared at the hangings, wrapping her arms around her legs as silence descended in the dormitory as each girl had been brought up to not show emotion so therefore got embarrassed when it was shown...that was until the mudblood came in, clearly not expecting the room to be full. Before she could retract from the room, however, Athenia had jumped up; seeing a way to vent her anger.

The girl, whose name was Kate Brown, took a step back as Athenia advanced towards her, Daphne, Lyra and Pansy behind her. Athenia narrowed her eyes as pent up frustrations came to the fore; frustrations regarding her status in her uncles household, how she was never allowed to show compassion or love even to her brothers, how she was expected to act a certain way regardless of her feelings and now how she had nearly lost her first friend because of a stupid

girl who shared this idiot's blood status. Frustration and anger bubble over and Athenia slapped the girl hard across the cheek.

"I thought we made ourselves clear on how we felt about your presence here, mudblood...."

The bullying went on most of the night and by the time Kate herself crawled into bed, resentment and hatred had built up heavily in her chest: hatred for her dorm mates, her house and for the wizarding world in general. Who cared what her blood status was, she thought viciously; wasn't it a person's ability as a witch that mattered more. She closed her eyes tightly, trying to sleep but finding it impossible as she had learnt early on that the black haired bitch in the bed next to her wasn't above of waiting until she was asleep before striking.

Kate held her wand tightly in her hand, her eyes narrowing as she decided that enough was enough and soon she would get her revenge. But she could wait. Waiting made revenge, in the long run, more worth it.

Smiling to herself as she outlined a plan in her mind she was unaware that three beds away Athenia lay in bed, her thoughts running along a similar line as she thought of her future and how Neville Longbottom would fit into it.

Both girls had no idea that in the months and years to come their plans would come to naught though for different reasons. No, each girl lay in complete ignorance: one in happy contemplation of her uncle's pleasure and of the next day when she would see Neville again; her one friend in this world of politics and hatred...the other making herself happy by imagining her dorm mates faces when she had finished with them.

The next day bloomed bright and clear and Athenia met Neville in the library, though it soon became clear that they couldn't study in such a stifling place. They decided to go outside where most of the students were outside, enjoying the last of the good autumn weather.

They spent a few hours on Herbology before putting their books away and laying back, Athenia watching some fourth year Gryffindors playing with the giant squid in the lake, its tentacles flying everywhere.

Neville however was looking at the black treetops of the vast forest, his eyes distant.

"You're being very quiet," Athenia drawled to Neville who shrugged.

"Are...are their unicorns in the forest?" he asked

"Suppose so. My uncle told me that there is everything in the forest...werewolves, unicorns, vampires...you name it."

The smile was wiped off Athenia's face as she saw Neville go ashen.

"Why? What's wrong?"

"I...I've started having these dreams where...unicorns are being killed...a creature of some sorts starts drinking their blood...Hermione told me that unicorn blood give you immortality; though your cursed because your drinking the blood of something so innocent."

Athenia fell silent before speaking slowly and carefully,

"But it is just a dream, right? It's not real..."

"Feels real."

Athenia and Neville looked at each other and Athenia was surprised to see such pain in his eyes. The words left her mouth before she could hold them back,

"We'll check it out this Friday when everyone's at the feast."

Neville looked so relieved her annoyance at herself was slowly replaced by a warm feeling in her stomach which she shoved away with the words,

“This way you will be able to see that all it is, is nightmares. We’ll be in and out before anyone notices we’re missing. I’ll meet you outside the statue of the headless lady in the dungeons as people make their way to the feast. Keep to the shadows and no one will bother you...if anyone asks why your down there just say you’re waiting for Avatar as he had something to say to you about your potions grades.”

Neville nodded, fighting down the initial nervousness at what they were about to do come Halloween. However in a way he was glad he wouldn’t be celebrating Halloween with the school as Halloween, to him, was nothing to celebrate seeing as it was his parents death anniversaries.

The holiday that was supposed to be so special to all of wizard kind, to celebrate the downfall of You Know Who, was to him a day of depression. But if he could slip away with Athenia then it could take his mind of his parents and put to rest these hideous dreams he had been having lately.

It was with a lighter heart that Neville walked back towards the castle, pleased to have something to concentrate on other than the depressing death anniversary of his parents.

Thanks, please review x

Athenia made her way up from the dungeons towards the statue of the headless lady. Older Slytherin students were also making their way up towards the ball at a leisurely pace in groups, blocking the winding damp hallways making it difficult for her to get past without seeming 'disrespectful'.

As she was slowly making her way up, dressed in a dark sapphire blue dress that set off her eyes her mind roamed back over the past week when Dumbledore, the muggle loving fool, had announced to the school that instead of a feast the Ministry had given Hogwarts permission to hold a ball to celebrate ten years of freedom. Neville's face at the Hufflepuff table had been a picture and when Athenia later cornered him, wanting to know what was wrong her only response had been,

"My parent's death is nothing to celebrate."

Having lost her parents at an early age too Athenia could sympathize but held back as she had been taught from the cradle that to open yourself up like that was a sign of weakness. However Neville was her friend so she settled for patting his arm awkwardly.

Following that Athenia had come up with a plan that Neville would ask her to the ball and, once it got under way, they would slip out into the forest to put Neville's mind at rest.

Of course the news that the boy who lived had asked a Slytherin to the ball had spread like wildfire through the school and Athenia had gotten used to jealous glances from the other girls in her year and, admiring ones from her own dorm mates that she had acquired such a powerful ally so early in the year; for though Neville Longbottom was seen by the population of the school as a bit weak he was still the savior of the wizarding world, after all.

Lyra's admiration soon turned to jealousy when, about a day after Neville had asked her to the ball, her uncle had sent her a gorgeous sapphire blue silk dress to wear as well as a letter filled with praise for securing such a powerful contact so early in the year.

Athenia had also heard that Neville asking her to the dance had caused an argument to spring up between Granger and Neville and now neither was on speaking terms. Athenia didn't care; the stupid mudblood shouldn't have gotten involved.

By the time she reached the headless statue she saw Neville standing there looking utterly terrified as Aleric, his date Virginia Avery, Shaun's younger sister, along with his usual clique stood talking to him. He turned round when she approached.

"Ah here she is...fashionably late like most woman." Virginia sent him an annoyed look as Athenia went to stand next to Neville who took her hand, more out of nervousness than anything but all the same it made Aleric raise his eyebrows,

"Now Athenia, as I've already told Neville here the Longbottoms are a good family and as the heir to the estate I wouldn't expect him to act anything less than what his family represent. The same goes for you: don't let the family down."

Athenia translated that to mean: don't act like a slut. Athenia gave him her best smile and replied sweetly,

"Would I?"

Aleric gave her his sternest look which just heightened his resemblance to his father,

"Just remember Athenia that it is not just father I can write to: your grandmother in Romania might not be too pleased to know that you are bringing the noble name of Rivers into dispute."

And he was gone, his peer group following behind him leaving a very angry and humiliated Athenia.

"Shall we go?" Neville offered hesitantly.

As they were walking up towards the great hall Neville asked,

"What did he mean? Your grandmother in Romania?"

“The name Rivers is not an English pureblood name; it’s Romanian. I have a whole host of relatives over there whom I visit at Christmas, Easter and during the summer with my brothers.”

Her voice was dull and flat.

“Oh! I mean, I knew the name Rivers was a pure-blooded one but I didn’t know it came from Romania?” Neville mused, hoping to draw Athenia into conversation. It worked.

“Yeah. The Rivers family go all the way back to the twelfth century. The pureblood society over there, though, is different from over here; especially with my family. Rather than the bride going to live with the husband’s family the husband comes to live with the brides family until the husband inherits his own families estate which he adds to the River’s estates.”

Neville’s face registered his confusion so Athenia elaborated.

“In the olden days the Rivers family was the most powerful family in wizarding Romania; anything they wanted they got so the locals paid tribute to them; over the years if a wizard outside of the family was lucky enough to be allowed to marry within the family, then what happened was the head of the Rivers household would give the marriage a year’s trial where the groom would live with the family for a year; in those days the wizard would have paid tribute to the family anyway so it became common practice to give his inheritance, his estates, to the head of the household as thanks for being allowed to continue with the marriage. Unfortunately the idea stuck so now the Rivers family hold dozens of estates and hundreds of acres of land.”

“Different from here,” Neville muttered as he took in the strange history, “But how did your dad marry your mum then? I mean, you were born here weren’t you?”

Athenia smiled as she warmed to the subject of her family history,

“When Grindalward was in power my great grandparents openly supported him. Because they were so powerful they were virtually

untouchable until the international wizards conference created a warrant for their arrest, sending them to Dulvanga; the Romanian prison. Although the family were still very powerful my great, great uncle sent my great aunts and grandfather over here; transferring my grandfather from Durmstrang to Hogwarts. My aunts were too old to go to school so they integrated themselves into pureblood society, living in Rivers manor over here while my grandfather completed his last two years at Hogwarts. After he had graduated he and my aunts and uncles moved back to Romania where the scandal had now died down. Within the year of moving back, my grandfather married my grandmother and, because he had fallen in love with Britain, took her back here against the initial family's wishes and had my father here. Father went to Hogwarts where he shared a dorm with my uncle Rod and through uncle Rod met my mother."

"Did your father go to live with her in her own home?"

Athenia smiled.

"No, she came to live with him as the rules over here were different and father had to abide by them. However he didn't go back to Romania, insisting a representative for the house of Rivers was needed over here. My grandparents stayed here until my grandfather died when I was one, shortly after Damien had been born and my grandmother, hating Britain more than anything, moved back to Romania; she's been there ever since."

Athenia stopped, suddenly aware she had just told her whole family history to a boy whom she had only known for a couple of months. Neville however just smiled at her kindly,

"Do you miss them? Your family in Romania I mean?"

Athenia thought of the huge castle in the middle of Transylvania that sat on a cliff, overlooking the Black Sea. She thought of those cold, prison like hallways and the gothic interior design, the draft that blew through the slit windows making the castle constantly cold and dank. The torches which hung suspended in the air casting shadows into corners. She thought of her family who seemed to resent and to a point, hate, the Lestranges for getting involved and obtaining

guardianship of the children before the Rivers had a chance to intervene. She thought on the cruelty of the medieval punishments still used there which stemmed from their medieval attitude.

“It is my duty to see them as they are family,” she replied. Neville looked at her, noticing she avoided the question but not commenting as now they were coming up to the great hall. Holding out his arm in the pureblood protocol Athenia placed her hand on his and they walked into the hall.

Balloons hung suspended from mid air, the house tables had been moved to the side; hosting dozens of different kinds of foods. The floor itself had been turned into a kind of dance floor and on the top dais a band was playing.

The two made their way towards the buffet, Neville falling more and more silent.

“Have a drink and something to eat. We’ll need the strength if we are going to slip out unnoticed.”

Neville took her advice and soon both teenagers had eaten enough.

“I think we should have one dance,” she said to Neville, noticing her cousin who had just broken from a waltz looking at her expectantly.

Neville led her onto the dance floor when the music struck up. The first thing Athenia noticed was that although he evidently knew the steps in dancing, his lack of confidence got in the way making him clumsy. Athenia tried not to cry out as he stood on her toes for the umpteenth time.

Athenia noticed from the corner of her eye a group of girls in Gryffindor glaring daggers at her and whispering among themselves; Neville noticed them, too.

“Ignore them; they’re just jealous,” because, despite himself, he was actually having a good time. Athenia hadn’t commented on his disastrous dancing skills, she had laughed at all his jokes and kept up a light hearted conversation.

"If they want to gossip lets give them something to really gossip about," she whispered, an evil glint in her eye.

"Like what?"

Then, before he could say anything, she leaned forward and brushed her lips against his: drawing back just as quickly, her face stained with crimson at what she had just done.

Neville looked at her dazed before seeing the furious expressions on the Gryffindor's faces and inspiration struck him; pulling her back towards him, leaning down so he could talk into her ear,

"If you really want to give them something to talk about we could go out now."

A wicked gleam appeared in her eye and she allowed Neville to lead her outside, where the music was now subdued. They walked down towards the forest and was halfway from the castle before both started giggling.

"Come on," she smiled at him, "Let's go."

They hurried into the forest and it was as the giddiness of having her first kiss wore off that she realized that she hadn't brought a cloak. Her mood plummeting she sped up in an effort to keep warm. What worried her though more was that Neville seemed to know the way, stopping every now and then before turning onto a hidden path.

"Nev I don't think..."

"Look," Neville's voice was strained as he pointed at something white and pearly lying in various globs on the ground. Athenia bent down and touched the liquid, surprised that it felt like silk and water mixed together. However she was starting to feel a chill that had nothing to do with the cold in the air.

"Neville..."

Neville ran through bushes as a scream ripped through the air. Athenia, after taking a deep breath, ran after him, leaving the path and cutting through bushes and onto rough terrain until they reached a clearing and what Athenia saw made her scream herself.

A unicorn was lying dead on the ground, its blood seeping out from under him. A cloaked hooded figure was a few steps from the unicorn, advancing towards Granger. But what frightened Athenia the most was not the fact that Hermione seemed to be in deep danger, nor the fact that at her feet was a dead unicorn. What frightened her most was that even though she couldn't see the hooded man's face, she could make out perfectly the silvery substance that seemed to glow in the dark, around his mouth.

The thought of slaying something so innocent and drinking its blood was so disgusting, even for Athenia, that she threw up in the bushes as Neville dived out of the way just as a spell came flying towards him.

Athenia jumped out of the way and hid behind a fallen tree log as the spell missed Neville and came towards her. The bush behind them burst into flames from the speeding green light; due to the dampness however of the forest the fire slowly fizzled out leaving a very charcoaled looking bush. Athenia didn't take this in as she watched her one and only friend charge at the figure whom had turned round and was raising its wand threateningly; Whoever it was turned round just as Neville came into contact, knocking him to the ground.

Athenia watched Neville's temporary insanity with a mixture of shock and disbelief as the wands clattered to the ground as both wizards rolled about on the floor in a tangle of arms and legs. The hooded stranger pushed Neville off who fell to the ground with a thud and a small squeak while grasping his wand and scrambling to his feet.

Raising his wand up high Athenia did the most insane things she ever thought she would do. Waving her wand and giving it a slight flick at a nearby fallen trunk she whispered,

"Wingardium Leviosa!"

The trunk rose up and drifted slowly towards the stanger as he posed to strike both Neville and Granger at the same time. The log had reached the man, hovering above his head. He looked up just as the log came crashing down, successfully knocking him to the ground though, Athenia noted with dismay, not out!

He swung round, ready to curse her into oblivion probably just as some nearby bushes rustled and a loud voice came,

“Oi...wha yer doin?”

The stranger, seeing a huge figure of a man, fled into the safety of the deep forest leaving a dead unicorn, three very stunned, not to mention frightened, teenagers and a very disgruntled looking gameskeeper.

“Wha you lot doin down ere?”

When he got no answer he looked down at the unicorn before sighing,

“Did yer see who killed it?” he asked; and as a response got three shakes of heads.

Hagrid shook his head in dismay and Athenia was shocked, and slightly disgusted, to note there were tears in the grown mans eyes.

“Come on then...better get yer back to the castle as everyone’s lookin fer yer.”

Then, lifting Neville from his sprawling position on the floor and helping Granger up from the corner he turned around and stomped off through the forests with the three first years following him.

Hehehe, a cliffie; I enjoy those. Well what do you think? A bit of recklessness on Athenia’s part as well as some background history? Anyway review and tell us; cheers x

Athenia followed Hagrid up towards the castle, her blue dress torn and her hair filled with pieces of twig and leaves. Behind her were Neville and Granger, both of which she refused to even look at as her mind played up; acting out worst case scenarios in which she got expelled and disowned by her family, forced to live as muggle for the rest of her days.

The mere thought made her blood run cold.

They were in the entrance hall now where Dumbledore, McGonagall, Avatar (her head of house), Sprout and Flitwick were standing in a small huddle, talking. They stopped as Hagrid approached and Athenia schooled her expression into one of emotionless indifference. If growing up with the Lestranges had taught her anything it was that when faced with conflict and punishment, it was better to stay silent than risk increase in punishment by saying anything at all. Take what you were given and move on.

Avatar, who was a tall thick set man with a bald head and round black piggy eyes, stared at her with those fathomless eyes. Athenia repressed a shiver at the coldness reflected there.

Dumbledore was talking but Athenia didn't take it in as she tried not to wriggle under that piercing stare given to her by her head of house.

It was only when Avatar clipped out,

"I agree Headmaster; Miss Rivers, if you will follow me please."

Athenia, dread settling in her chest, followed her head of house; her feet feeling like lead as she descended into the dungeons with her head bowed against the faces of the older Slytherin students who passed curious glances over her and her tattered dress.

Avatar opened his office door and, holding it open with one arm, pointed in with his other hand.

Athenia, feeling that she was walking to her execution, walked inside the dimly lit room, wincing as the door slammed shut behind her and

Avatar strode into the room; seating himself behind the desk; pointedly not offering Athenia a seat.

“Explain!”

Athenia took a deep breath,

“What happened, Professor, was that Neville and I went outside for a bit of fresh air and ended up going for a walk. As we skirted the forest we heard a scream and Neville ran into the forest and I followed him. Granger was there next to a dead unicorn and a cloaked figure.”

It was true...to an extent.

Avatar eyed her critically,

“Your behavior tonight, especially for one of your blood, was appalling. Sneaking out of the safety of the school, fraternizing with mud...muggle borns,” he amended, knowing that as a teacher he wasn’t supposed to feel this way but needing to get the point across to the trembling girl in front of him,

“To top that off you didn’t even think how it would look, you leaving the school with the Boy Who Lived...”

“He’s my friend, why shouldn’t I go for a walk with him?” Athenia blurted out in her naive eleven year old way.

Avatar’s black eyes flashed with anger,

“Rivers and Lestrage’s do not, under any circumstances, have ‘friends’. They have high acquaintances and important contacts but under no circumstances, do ‘friends’ come into the equation. Friends mean you open yourself up, and friends hold you back from achieving your true potential; I would have thought your uncle would have drummed that into you?”

Athenia fell silent as Avatar repeated what her uncle firmly believed in.

“And for your information, Miss Rivers, being seen by the whole student body as leaving the hall un-chaperoned with Longbottom is one of the worst things you can do as it affects your desirable marriage prospect.”

Athenia looked confused at this last one. Why should leaving the hall with another student affect her in such a way?

“You understand that I will be writing to your family about this, along with a month’s detention and, even though I am loath to do so from my own house, fifty points from Slytherin.”

Athenia swallowed as she thought on what her housemates would say when the last was found out.

“Dismissed.”

Athenia walked out, dreading entering the common room where she already knew what was waiting for her. Aleric would demand to know what had gone on and as there were still Slytherins up in the great hall then as they came down they would notice the loss of points. It also wouldn’t take a genius to know who lost them.

Walking into the common room Athenia stopped as Aleric and his fifth years came storming towards her. Athenia thought that she had never seen her cousin so angry. As he reached her he raised his voice for all to hear,

“Fifty points,” he spluttered, “How could you be so...so...so...”

Apparently he couldn’t find a word bad enough to describe her so he, face screwed up with fury, raised his wand high ready to curse her into oblivion as a lesson for throwing Slytherin back into third place and putting Gryffindor in the lead: Unforgivable.

“Mr Lestrangle,” Athenia’s eyes flew open at the sound of the headmaster’s voice, “I understand you wish to speak to your cousin but would it be possible just for me to interrupt for a moment?”

“Yes sir.” The anger was barely discernable underneath Aleric’s voice. Athenia turned round; aware she was turning her back unwisely on her cousin but wanting to face the headmaster outright.

“I have spoken to Mr Longbottom and I am here to offer you my congratulations.”

Athenia looked confused,

“Mr Longbottom has told me the entire story, confirmed by Miss Granger which is why I am here to award you sixty points for outstanding bravery in the face of adversity and loyalty towards your friend. I would also like to say that although what you did was foolish in the extreme and, I hope, never to be repeated,” Athenia nodded vigorously, “It must be understood that your hearts intentions were in the right place and therefore must be rewarded. Good night and sleep well.”

The last was addressed to everyone in the now silent common room and Athenia just stared at the blank stretch of wall where Dumbledore had disappeared, gaping at her luck. Of course she still had a month’s worth of detentions but what was that compared to being blown up by the higher years?

Turning around she was surprised and slightly pleased to see her own surprise mirrored on Aleric’s face as he lowered his wand. Suddenly the old anger was back, though this time not as red hot,

“Don’t think I won’t be writing to father about this.”

Athenia cast her eyes down, looking suitably chastised while keeping silent as Aleric moved off back to his usual corner near the fire.

Taking a deep breath Athenia carefully made her way towards the dormitories, slipping into her own. She ignored the mudblood who was sitting on the bed, eyeing Athenia warily.

Just as Athenia sat on her bed and pulled out one of her mother’s diaries that she had retrieved from the box and kept in her trunk at the start of the school year, the door flew open and Lyra, looking

furiously insane, strode in. It was a mark of how angry she was that she, also, ignored the mudblood.

"I bet you just loved that," Lyra hissed, her face an interesting shade of red.

"Loved what?" Athenia returned mildly, still reading the entry of her mother's first week at Hogwarts.

"Loved the fact that Aleric backed down, that the old muggle loving fool awarded you sixty points in front of everyone, that...that...oh look at me will you!"

Lyra snatched the diary from Athenia and chucked it across the room where it landed, unfortunately, in the fire.

Athenia gave a small scream and leapt from the bed, grabbed the poker and fished it out, stamping on the flames to put it out. The diary, once the flames had gone, was blackened and, although not terribly damaged, the top half had been burnt off.

Athenia picked up the diary and turned it over in her hands, shock rippling through her body. Although she had more diaries this one had been her favourite as it had been filled with her mother's memories of her own first year...and besides that it had been hers; a memoir of her beloved mother...her mother who had died defending her beliefs.

Athenia felt tears sting her eyes though she fought them back as she opened the book, watching as a few pages crumbled away from the ash leaving only a half burnt away page. She didn't even notice that Lyra had gone silent behind her, so absorbed in her shock. Athenia had always known that Lyra hadn't liked her very much; the feeling was mutual really, in every way; but never had Lyra even attempted to ruin something that belonged to her 'aunt Ella'.

After her death every thing that had belonged to Ella had been given to Athenia over the course of the years; even her dresses which (to Athenia's mind were old fashioned even if they were beautiful and sophisticated) all held a place of honour in her wardrobe back home

as it was something to remember her mother by. But it was these diaries that proved that she had lived, gone to Hogwarts just like Athenia...it was her thoughts written down and through them Athenia had felt closer to her mother. Now she was one diary down because of Lyra's jealousy and stupidity.

Only one thing seemed important at the moment and that was to get the diary fixed. Surly Avatar could do it? He was a powerful wizard who had studied all aspects of magic before becoming a teacher, specialising in Potions. Pushing past Lyra, making sure to bash her against the door post, Athenia exited the common room and hurried up to her head of house's office door, the diary being hugged closely to her chest.

Knocking on the door he heart dropped when she heard nothing from inside, indicating that no one was in.

Footsteps however from round the corner, two of them, made Athenia realise that she was out of the common room after hours. Pushing herself into the shadows and hiding behind a particularly ugly, albeit large, gargoyle, as common sense drove itself home she was surprised to see Avatar and Quirrell who was sporting a large bruise to his forehead.

"...Stupid idea; Dumbledore noticed you gone and why wouldn't he? It was the Halloween ball; any other night would have been fine..."

"I...I d...didn't think."

Athenia watched as Avatar and swung round to face Quirrell, his face beetroot,

"And what about Rivers and the Longbottom brat? Longbottom has already told Dumbledore..."

"He c...c....can't prove an....anything."

"Can't he?" Avatar demanded, "He'll be keeping a close watch on you Quirrell, mark my words. If anything happens to the damn stone I'll know where to look. Keep your council, keep a low profile and wait for

the opportunity to take the Philosopher stone. When the opportunity rises I'll help you but if you jump into this foolishly don't expect my help."

Athenia pushed herself back into the wall silently, staying stock still in case either professor should hear her. She couldn't believe what she was hearing! They were talking about stealing something from under Dumbledore's nose.

"Now in before one of the Slytherins comes out from that blasted common room; the older ones have a habit of sneaking out, especially the Lestrangle heir. Too like his father the boy is."

And then both professors were gone, inside the office with the door slammed shut. Athenia stood there, torn between what she should do before fear of the unknown set in and she hurried back to the common room, still holding the burnt out diary close to her chest as she thought on what her teachers were plotting.

Of course like her family she didn't like Dumbledore, but he was a very powerful wizard who had devoted his life to teaching magic to children so she respected him for that if nothing else. Also, she had her own dreams about being as powerful, if not more, than him one day. Whether these dreams were the influence of the box upon her mind (a box which she had been avoiding since the strange man appeared) or whether they had been fed to her by Slytherins' hunger for power and glory she didn't know: all she did know was that she would be one of the most powerful witches of the age. The only problem was, was that she was being outsmarted by a mudblood...a mudblood who now owed her life to Athenia....Athenia grinned at this thought as she entered the common room

The grin soon flew off her face as she spotted Lyra sitting with Daphne and Pansy. Spotting Athenia Lyra's face turned a light pink and she turned her face away. Athenia didn't care and decided to mentally disown her cousin before she spotted Aleric, sitting by himself writing something down: probably his promised letter to his father. A thought of how to get back at Lyra occurred to her and she started towards her eldest cousin.

Taking a deep breath Athenia walked over to him, gathering up all her courage to look him in the eye as he glared at her when he spotted her coming towards him.

Holding out the diary Aleric looked suspiciously at it before snapping,

“What?”

“Can you fix it...it was mothers and Lyra threw it in the fire. I found it in the box uncle Rod gave me over the summer and I was going to show it to him when we got home at Christmas, only...” she trailed off her elaborated account of what happened and the look of sadness on her face wasn’t totally faked.

“That diary was Aunt Ella’s?”

“There’s more, only this was an account of her first year and it talks about uncle Rod and uncle Rabastan a lot so I thought to ask you to make duplicate copies of all the diaries so I could give them one of each for Christmas as I know they loved mother...but now I can’t if this diary is wrecked because then it wouldn’t be a full set...so can you fix it?”

She hadn’t considered giving them duplicate copies at all; but it was a nice touch if she said so and it would get Lyra into more trouble as Aleric loved and revered his father above anyone else. He knew how Rod felt about Ella and how much reading her thoughts would mean to him...

“Lyra did this,” he growled as she turned his full force glare on his younger sister.

“She grabbed it from me when I was reading it and threw it in the fire...she was angry at me for wining Slytherin so many points...”

Aleric took the diary from her and examined it before placing it on the desk and waving his wand wordlessly over it. Nothing happened and he frowned before saying loudly and clearly,

“Reparo!”

Again, nothing happened and Aleric shook his head, giving the diary back to her.

"I'm sorry Thea; it would have been a lovely gift...I'm sure father and uncle Rab will appreciate the other diaries though," he dropped his voice to an angry hiss, "I'll deal with Lyra though...disloyalty towards Slytherin, Father and Aunt Ella is not tolerated as far as I'm concerned."

Again the look of sadness on Athenia's face wasn't totally faked though she did play it up a bit as she was sure her aunt would know some dark spells to fix it...

"Thanks Aleric," she murmured with deference as Aleric stood up, his wand out as he made towards his sister. Aleric flashed his cousin a smile before taking off towards his sister.

Athenia didn't stay around to see what Aleric would do. She knew Aleric would probably write to his father about Lyra 'vandalising Aunt Ella's property' while punishing her himself, and to an extent Athenia wasn't bothered.

There had always been rivalry between the two girls as far back as Athenia could remember; and what she had just done with Aleric was nothing short of what Lyra would have done if their places were switched: this should teach Lyra to keep her hands off her things...or her mothers things.

Making her way back to her dorm Athenia thought back on what she had heard Avatar and Quirrell talking about, deciding as she climbed into bed, to speak to Neville about it the next day.

The next day started badly despite the good weather outside.

It started at breakfast when the mail came and Athenia spotted a familiar grey eagle owl come flying towards her, dropping a red envelope on her plate before hooting at her disdainfully and flying off to drop a large brown wrapped package in front of Aleric.

However Athenia didn't notice the big brown package; all she saw was her aunt Bellatrix's writing on the now smoking red envelope.

"Open it before it explodes," Daphne, next to her, hissed.

With trembling fingers Athenia turned it over and opened it, nearly dying on the spot as her aunt's voice, magnified to be a hundred times louder than usual vibrated round the hall. Shame filled her as every head swivelled round to see who had gotten the howler,

"ATHENIA ISABELLA RIVERS, HOW DARE YOU BRING SUCH SHAME ON THE FAMILY BY GOING INTO THE FOREST LIKE YOU DID WITHOUT A CHAPERONE! DO YOU HAVE NO SHAME GIRL? NO FAMILY LOYALTY? AND RESCUING A MUDBLOOD! YOU FILTHY DISGUSTING BLOOD TRAITOR; WAIT UNTIL YOUR UNCLE GETS HIS HANDS ON YOU..."

Athenia ducked down under the table as her aunt's voice continued to pound her eardrums,

"...FILLED WITH SHAME; AND YOUR UNCLE...WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? IF YOU EVEN SO MUCH AS FORGET TO HAND A HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT IN I'LL COME DOWN THERE MYSELF AND DEAL WITH YOU! IS THAT CLEAR?"

Athenia nodded from under the table and the noise died instantly as the envelope burst into flames and turned into ash, floating down onto her scrambled eggs.

Athenia returned back up as the chatter around her resumed and, from the corner of her eye, spotted a very battered looked Lyra smirking with Pansy. Daphne just gave her a pitying look before turning back to her breakfast.

From the Gryffindor table Athenia noticed Potter and the stupid red head laughing and imitating Bellatrix. Watching this her face turned bright red, and, unable to stay in the great hall any longer, she abandoned her breakfast, grabbed her bag and left.

Athenia was halfway towards the charms classroom when Neville caught up with her.

“Thea...THEA!”

Athenia turned round and glared at him, the boy who had brought all this shame down on her head.

“Come to gloat,” she bit at him and regretted it immediately when Neville looked hurt.

“No I’ve come to see how you are.”

“I’ll bet,” Athenia snapped despite herself and turned to go, “You can thank your mud...muggle born friend for getting me into so much trouble...and for putting Slytherin in second place for the house cup.”

“Yeah...Dumbledore gave me sixty points as well...but it’s not her fault Thea; Potter and his friends had been nasty to her earlier and she’d run into the forest and gotten lost...”

“Yeah, that’s just the kind of stuff she’d come up with isn’t it.”

“It’s true Athenia,” Neville answered, losing patience himself.

“You trust too easily Neville...”

“What did Avatar say; you looked really upset this morning when you came in for breakfast...” Neville changed the subject, not wanting to hear Athenia’s prejudices. He knew that when she wanted to be she could be very nice and, well kind wouldn’t be the right word, but she could be a laugh with her dry wit; and her loyalty seemed unshakable: like his.

“He gave me a month’s worth of detentions.” Avatar’s word about Neville came floating back and suddenly Athenia was sick of them all: her family, her potions teacher, pureblood society and its rules...she was sick of the lot of them. Feeling rebellious she told Neville about Avatar and Quirrall and what she had overheard them speaking about.

“Philosophers Stone? Never heard of it...why would they want to steal it though? And with Dumbledore here they must be mad...we need to stop them.”

Athenia paused. Going along with Neville before had earned her a month's detention and a howler from her aunt...but then she did consider Neville a friend, despite what Avatar had said.

“Well we need to find out what it is...and if they want too steal it then we'll have to find out where it is hidden...maybe its in Dumbledore's office and they're planning a mass break in...”

“It'll be on the third floor corridor. Dumbledore said it was out of bounds so it stands to reason it would be there if he didn't want any one finding it,” Athenia cut in with her usual cool logic, “and as for what it is...well we can look it up in the library when I'm either not in lessons or detention which may be after Christmas by the time Avatar's finished with me.”

“Then we can look it up over the holidays...”

“I'm in Romania over the Christmas.”

“Then you can look it up over there can't you? I mean, your relatives won't mind will they?”

“No...suppose not,” Athenia replied vaguely though she knew that to get usage of the library, when it was frowned on for women to read too much over there, would be hard.

“I've got detentions until the end of this week so I'll get a head start...if you want.”

Athenia nodded but spotted some Gryffindors and Slytherins coming their way.

“I'll see you later,” Athenia muttered

“Yeah see you.”

Neville walked off just as Daphne and Pansy came up, Lyra noticeably absent. The door opened and they all trooped inside.

As the lesson and gradually the day passed, Athenia realised that despite her aunts anger at her and the upcoming detention the kindness that Neville had shown her and the fact that she was investigating possible theft from Dumbledore with a friend would help her get through anything.

Thanks guys, please review

November dragged by, mainly due to Athenia's detentions; and into December where, seemingly over night, the castle was decorated to the nines with mistletoe hanging from doorways, tinsel hanging from trees with baubles the size of Athenia's face shining

November dragged by, mainly due to Athenia's detentions, until, finally, it was December where, seemingly over night, the castle was decorated to the nines with mistletoe hanging from doorways, tinsel hanging from trees with baubles the size of Athenia's face shining brightly and adding festivity to the castle.

By the time Athenia got out of her last detention with Avatar she was heartily sick of spending three hours each night preparing potion ingredients and vowed to herself never to get into any more trouble, knowing secretly that her vow was a load of rubbish.

However during the time she had spent in detention, and the time she was catching up on her homework, Neville had tried looking up what the Philosophers Stone and so far was having no luck at all.

So it was that by the time the term ended and Athenia was dragging her trunk down the train corridor with Daphne behind her, it was with a heavy heart that they hadn't managed to achieve anything despite the promises to look harder over the holidays.

Athenia had also been invited to sit with Neville but refused when she saw Granger in the compartment. Ever since the Howler, Athenia had avoided Granger like the plague; which was why, now, she and Daphne, whom Athenia had bumped into while searching for a compartment, were walking up and down the corridors until they found the compartment where Pansy and Lyra were sitting. Not that she would have sat with such filth anyway, she reminded herself as she pushed her trunk into the over hanging luggage rack.

The cousins pointedly ignoring each other, which they had been doing since the diary incident, Athenia struck up conversation with Daphne, challenging her to a game of chess while Pansy struck up conversation with Lyra about the holidays.

“Naturally you and your family will be invited to our Christmas Party Lyra,” Pansy remarked with a sly look towards Athenia, “It’s just such a shame not everyone will be able to make it: mother is going out of her way to ensure that this year will out do the Avery’s last year.”

Not only was this a massive statement to make as, apparently, the Avery’s Christmas Party Ball year had been declared publically by her aunt Bellatrix as the best she had ever been to; but it also annoyed Athenia that plebeian such as Pansy could infer that she was missing out on such a mediocre ball.

Deciding to put Pansy in her place Athenia smiled back sweetly,

“Really, Pansy? I was under the impression that uncle Rod, uncle Rab, Auntie Bellatrix and Aunt Hera always refused invitations by new money families,” Pansy flushed beetroot red as the Parkinson’s, in comparison to the Lestrangle’s, were a newish family with only six generations of pureblood. Determined to go the full way in getting her point across, she carried on,

“Of course, Christmas Balls are never called Parties; the term parties infers it will not be goods, more child like if you understand; and as for myself and my brothers not being there, if we would have come at all, I would rather spend the time in the company of my family who go right back to the Twelfth century and whom are Romanian Aristocracy, and watch my brother, the heir, grow up with the proper values instilled in him, and a huge catch for unmarried pureblood girls, rather than be used as a pawn to get the family into higher places merely be marriage. Don’t you agree Daphne?”

It was bitchy and low, Athenia knew that; and the mortified face of Pansy’s told her that her point had been brought home; but Athenia didn’t care. She had never liked Pansy much and she didn’t appreciate being brought down by someone as pathetic as her. Lyra was keeping determinedly silent while Daphne nodded cautiously, not wanting Athenia’s steel tongue turned on her.

Pansy’s flush turned to a deep purple from humiliation and embarrassment. Turning back to Daphne and the chessboard

Athenia studied her pieces before moving her queen and saying in a satisfied voice,

“Checkmate.”

Athenia stood in her room, staring at the three large trunks that held all her clothes, five brand new, very expensive, robes and dresses; her school work that she was to complete over the holidays; her best hair accessories and jewellery that included a large hair clip made from pure silver with emeralds and the Lestrangle coat of arms as well as jewellery given to her mother by her father on their wedding day: a necklace with a very fine gold chain hosting a large black diamond with the Rivers coat of arms meticulously engraved on the diamond; a ring which was silver with sapphire and, again the Rivers coat of arms: this had been her mother’s engagement ring.

There had been a lot of bother with this ring. Because Damien was the eldest son of the now deceased head of the family, and therefore the heir and to-be head of the family on his seventeenth birthday; the ring, the Rivers had argued, was to be given to him so he could present it to his future bride. Rodolphus argued back that he wasn’t having his nephew having a woman’s ring regardless of some odd Romanian tradition. If Ella and Jason had been alive it might have been different; but they weren’t and so anything that had been Ella’s was now Athenia’s and anything that was Jason’s was shared between the two boys, Damien favoured as he was the heir.

After much argument the Rivers backed down, though if anything the argument only served to create more animosity between the two families.

Athenia jolted herself back to the present when the door opened and Damien and Lewis slipped in. Lewis gave Athenia a small smile from behind Damien, whom he admired, looked up to and, to an extent, revered while Damien just scowled.

“What’s wrong Damien?” Athenia asked. Damien, at ten, was the exact replica of his father; taller than her with broad shoulders, carelessly handsome even at ten with cold blue eyes and lazily wavy

dark blond hair. However the similarities didn't end there: their uncle often remarked that Damien was in every way, personality and all, his father's son: calculating, cold and to an extent cruel he was different from Athenia who's outward appearance appeared to be similar but was, in fact, mostly front and mental walls designed to keep people from getting too close or, like her family had, hurt her. The only person the defences seemed to have failed against was Neville.

"Nothing," he replied, throwing himself on the bed; his new magnificent purple robes looking stiff and uncomfortable.

Lewis sat on the side of the bed next to his brother. As the younger son he was dressed in new green robes that fell just above his knobbly knees, as was seen right for children of eight. To Athenia's mind he looked ridiculous. Especially next to Damien whose robes at least went down to his ankles.

Even at eight Lewis was quickly outgrowing her, coming up to just above Athenia's shoulder. His blond hair was more of the darker variety than Damien's light blond hair, and much lighter than Athenia's dark brown hair; though unlike his siblings whom had their father's blue eyes, he had inherited their mother's deep dark forest green eyes. His frame leant more towards the wiry lithe aspect than Damien's lean build and Athenia's willowy frame.

"Then why," Athenia asked with increasing irritation, "did you come in scowling."

"Doesn't matter," Damien replied, looking out of the window moodily before seeing himself in a long mirror in the corner and dusting himself down, wiping away invisible specks of dust.

Athenia held back a laugh: the word 'vain' was an understatement when it came to her brother. Having always been treated as a royal little prince, here in England because he was her mother's first, always adored, son, and abroad in Romania because he was the heir; he had no care for anyone other than himself and his siblings. He knew image was important, physically and emotionally, so worked hard to represent the image his 'dear grandmamma' in Romania would want. But because of his nature he got to know people, got to

know their preferences then used them to his own advantage. Lyra had once remarked that he was a spoilt brat; though somehow the description, despite the amount of devotion he received, was untrue.

Their difference in opinion on their grandmother couldn't have been more opposite, either; but then how would Damien know what it felt like to be treated as an inferior species? To be seen only as marriage material and a vessel to carry on the lines? How would the precious heir who was revered in every way understand that?

But despite the difference in their upbringing they were very close. Athenia had no idea how considering they were so opposite, but she loved the bond the three of them had despite their many differences: Damien the revered, slightly spoilt eldest son; Athenia the daughter who would make good marriage material to formulate alliances with other families; and Lewis: the second son, always overlooked in favour of his brother.

Maybe it was due to the fact that they had all been there when their parents had been murdered, that even though Lewis had been only a year old, Damien and Athenia had stuck together in the long nights and days following their parents' death, watching out for the other and protecting their baby brother, sharing the pain and loneliness. It was from this that the three very different siblings shared a bond that Aleric and Lyra so sadly lacked.

"Anyway, uncle Rod said that we have to be down in the hallway by half six so he can give us the portkey."

Glancing at the clock on her bedside table Athenia noted they only had an hour left so, closing the last of her trunks, the one that held the box as, despite herself, she couldn't leave it behind; she turned to her brothers.

"Ready?"

"We have an hour..."

"Uncle Rod will be pleased if we're early...that way we won't be hanging around..."

“An hour though,” Damien winged to her, revealing his true age despite the calmly detached barriers he placed up around anyone else; Lewis scrunching up his face to mimic his brothers tone.

Athenia sighed and sat down next to Lewis, agreeing silently but wanting to get away from the box. Since refusing to go in it, the power it held over her had dimmed considerably and she felt more like herself again than she had in a while. But despite this fact she was still scared of it, and of the strange figure that had appeared out of no where, she recognised that her brothers were right: an hour was way too early to go down; thus leaving her to think up a topic of conversation while they waited.

She had already exhausted Hogwarts as a topic within the first few days of arriving home. Her family had been delighted at her acquaintance with the Boy Who Lived, and how close they seemed to be getting; her uncle was even more pleased with her high grades which contrasted to Lyra’s average ones. To top that off her aunt Bellatrix, upon hearing of how she won sixty points for Slytherin, seemed to have forgiven her, her interaction with Granger at Halloween. Athenia had also described the castle to her brothers and younger cousins in minute detail, whereas Lyra had blanked them since her return, seemingly thinking she was above them simply because she was at Hogwarts.

Aleric, before they had left Hogwarts, had made replicas of the diaries with a sincere promise not to breathe a word about her intentions with the old books. Thinking of the diaries made Athenia think of the damaged one, the one she couldn’t bring herself to throw away, the one that recorded her mother’s first year and her thoughts on Hogwarts...the one her uncles would probably most like to read...suddenly a thought struck her and she jumped up immediately and ran to the wardrobe, pulling from the depths the half burnt out diary. There was someone who could possibly help her...and if she couldn’t then no-one could.

“Thea, what are you doing?”

Athenia didn't answer Lewis's innocent question but raced from the room, thinking where her aunt would be. The potions lab seemed the most obvious answer, a place she was forbidden from entering without express permission. The clock on the hallway showed that she only had fifty minutes before she was to report in the hallway so, abandoning caution, she raced downstairs to the ground floor and down a smaller stone staircase under the main stairs where, at the bottom, sat a great oak door that led to the vast potions lab where her aunt spent much of her free time.

Taking a deep breath Athenia knocked and waited, hoping that her aunt wasn't in.

This hope was dashed when the door opened and Bellatrix stuck her head out, her face twisting into fury when she saw who it was.

Before Bellatrix could curse her niece for breaking her orders regarding the potions lab, Athenia broke out into an explanation of why she was there; making sure to heap subtle praise on her aunt's magical ability; also emphasizing the fact that she would be leaving in forty five minutes so would it be too much bother if her aunt could try and fix it now?

Bellatrix looked at her niece suspiciously, delving into her mind and realising that what Athenia said was the truth and becoming even more furious at what her daughter had done.

"Give it here," she snapped, taking the diary as she slipped out of the potions lab, closing the door behind her to block out the rising fumes that came from within.

After examining it closely and waving her wand over the diary several times she raised an eyebrow at the diary,

"I can fix it Athenia," she started slowly, "but I'll need some of your blood."

Athenia suddenly had a flashback of the last time her uncle had required her blood and suddenly the diary didn't seem that important. However she knew her aunt despised any kind of weakness and to

admit her fear would provoke punishment immediately. The thought of Bellatrix's punishment outweighed any fear in regards to her giving her blood so, cautiously, she nodded and held out her hand over the diary as her senses told her this was what Bellatrix wanted.

Conjuring a knife out of thin air Bellatrix cut deep into the girl's arm, letting blood cover the diary before healing the wound quickly to prevent any more precious pure blood being lost.

"Ut restituo sub cruor of filia"

The diary turned a bright blinding blue for a second before the light died and Athenia watched as the diary began to repair itself until it looked as if it had never been touched by fire.

Still gaping at the incredible power of the Dark Arts she turned to her aunt, surprised that the first words that came out of her mouth weren't 'thank you' as she had intended, but

"Can you teach me how to do that?"

Bellatrix laughed, a high ear splitting noise that showed the woman's insanity but reassured Athenia that she herself wasn't going to be cursed into oblivion.

"Not now," Bellatrix replied, "when you get back from Romania maybe...if you show promise that is. Now, you said this was for Rodolphus and Rabastan?"

Another wave of her wand and Athenia was holding two extra copies of the diaries while Bellatrix placed the original on top, making Athenia nearly buckle under the heavy books.

"Now I won't be up to bid you and the boy's goodbye as I have a potion to finish but I will see you in two weeks."

Then the door was slammed shut and Athenia took a deep breath before hurrying back up the steps, thinking on her aunt's easy acceptance of teaching her dark arts. Of course her aunt was seeped in them and any interest in the subject was bound to please her. Lyra

never showed much interest while Aleric, like his mother and father, enjoyed twisting and manipulating them to meet his own ends in private. She supposed it would please her aunt that her niece showed an interest.

It was only as she got up to her room, which had been vacated by the boys, and she was rewrapping her uncles gifts, that she wondered why she was taking an interest. Of course she had grown up with the Dark Arts and wasn't frightened of them as some others her age might be; she saw the advantage of using them to her own ends...but she had never really considered learning actually how to do the spells and somehow the thought both scared her and interested her.

Glancing at the clock she saw that she now had fifteen minutes to get downstairs. Her trunks were already gone but she had one more thing to do,

"Filly?"

A small ugly thing appeared with huge tennis ball eyes appeared, looking up at her fearfully. The house elf, Filly, bowed deeply,

"Miss Athenia called Filly?"

"I need you to take these gifts and place them under the tree after I'm gone...I don't want Lyra to touch them so place some spells on them that prevent anyone, except uncle Rod and uncle Rab, from getting too close until they're actually opened."

"Yes miss. Filly is honoured to serves such a worthy mistress; yes Filly will do as miss Athenia says."

Then, taking the brightly wrapped parcels, Filly disappeared with a loud crack and Athenia hurriedly made her way downstairs where her uncles, Aleric and her brothers were waiting next to the trunks. Damien and Lewis each had one while her three trunks stood by themselves

“Three trunks, Athenia? Do you honestly need to take three trunks for two weeks?” Were Rodolphus’s first words to her as she reached the small party of people.

Athenia cast her eyes down but nodded all the same. She thought she heard her uncle mutter ‘typical woman’ before turning back to her brothers and handing Damien a large scruffy boot.

“This will take you straight to Rivers Hall. Fingers on it now, and I will see you in two weeks.”

Aleric had just finished shaking Damien’s hand as one heir to another before ruffling Lewis’s hair and winking at Athenia while smiling warmly at her. Somehow keeping hold of her three trunks, she managed to move her elbow so it was touching the boot.

Rabastan raised his eyebrow at her and sighed before giving her hair a ruffle,

“Just like your mother,” he told her fondly, to which Rodolphus gave a strained smile. Athenia just managed to return the smile before she felt the familiar feeling of a hook behind her navel, pulling her back into bright spinning lights as her elbow became glued to the boot.

Because it was an international portkey purchased from the ministry it took far longer to reach their destination than it would if they were travelling within the UK.

Images flew past them, colours blending into each other, making Athenia dizzy. After what seemed like an age Athenia landed with a hard bump on a stone floor, her trunks and brothers landing next to, as well as around her.

Staring around Athenia noted the small back waiting room where serfs waited to be seen by their liege lord, as well as were people whom were visiting appeared. The room itself was nothing remarkable; a few chairs lined the stone walls, with torches hanging from holders which in turn were chained to the walls. The stone floor was lined with broken pieces of straw scattered about.

Sitting up and rubbing her lower back where she had banged it, Athenia looked round and accepted Damien's hand to help her up.

It was just after she had dusted down her new deep rainforest green dress from pieces of straw that the door opened; there standing in the doorframe stood a small hunched woman with grey hair pulled to within an inch of it's life and small blue eyes in a heavily lined wrinkled face: this was her maternal grandmother; Vega 'Ghezzo' Rivers.

Thanks guys, please read and review

Christmas Eve Relations! If there was one thing that was to be tolerated during the stay in Romania during Christmas, it was when distant relations would all come over for the Christmas period; relations that Athenia only vaguely remembered and even then names usually eluded her; as they only came to the main River's estate during the Christmas Period, Athenia had begun to think of them as Christmas Relations.

However despite the relatives that had come in flocks over the past few days, there was a strict hierarchy that had to be kept and it was, ironically, the dinner table that showed this more than anything else.

At the top of the table, near the head seat, sat the intermediate family members, the people Athenia were more familiar with rather than second, third and even forth cousins.

The head of the table was vacant, and would be until Damien turned seventeen and became head of the family. Next to the vacant seat on the right sat Damien in the heir's seat with Lewis next to him as the second son, gender over riding age; next to Lewis sat Athenia.

Opposite Damian sat their grandmother with their Great Uncle Flynn Cyrus (a tall athletic man with silver hair and sharp grey eyes) on her right; and their great aunt, their grandfather's eldest sister, Otila (tall willowy with silver blond hair and cold blue eyes) next to him. Next to them sat their other great uncle Andre Dragomir, a short stout man with long silky white hair and small green eyes, who was married to their grandfather's second eldest sister Olga (like her husband she too was short and stout with ugly deformed features).

Beside them sat Corina, Flynn's only daughter, and Aries Dragomir, Corina's husband and Andre's eldest son. The family, Athenia noted with slight disgust, didn't mind marrying into themselves. Next to them sat Doriel and Igor Dragomir, Aries sister and youngest brother.

Opposite the elders of the family, and next to Athenia, sat Aries son and daughter: Danna and Demetri Dragomir. Demetri in his early forties with the cold, aristocratic, handsome features of the River's line with the customary blond hair and blue eyes; while Danna who

took more after the Dragomir side of the family: tawny straight hair and amber eyes.

Further down the huge table sat the people Athenia knew only by reading about in the many Romanian pureblood books her relatives had sent over to England: The Dulvagra side of the family, the Adamson's, the Arco's and the Dobra's: Each as pure as the next one, and each equally as dangerous.

Athenia listened to the table talk that went on around her, mainly intended towards Damien. As the future head of house it was important to get into his good graces early. Casting a small glance at her brother Athenia saw that he wasn't buying their fake compliments any more than she was.

Holding back a loud sigh she let her gaze wander round the room, from the huge table that could easily sit sixty people though which currently was only housing thirty, to the massive stone fireplace that took up a whole wall of the low lying long room, letting out blasts of heat so that the room felt like a furnace.

It was Christmas Eve and, like every year, Athenia wanted more than anything to be able to spend Christmas with her family back in England. Or Hogwarts even, as the decorations had looked fabulous as she had left when term broke up.

Pansy's words from the train came back to her and Athenia stabbed her meat hard with her fork, earning a couple of raised eyebrows from her brothers.

Not that she wanted to spend time with such a low life like Pansy...but when half of her relatives didn't speak English, and the few members who could usually spoke in broken sentences, usually creating awkward situations when words somehow got lost in translation.

Looking out of a stain glass window behind her uncle Flynn, Athenia watched as snow fell heavily from the heavens. When she had been small Athenia had loved the snow but after a while it grew old and boring; especially when she and her brothers couldn't leave the

courtyard unaccompanied as it was seen as not proper for a young girl to go wandering around the countryside on her own. Somehow the presence of a groom always seemed to dampen their spirits.

However her attention was diverted from her depressing thoughts when her uncle Flynn's voice broke through her thoughts,

"Athenia; Hogwarts is good for you, no?"

Snapping back into reality she plastered a large fake smile on her face and started explaining about Hogwarts, getting more relaxed as she went into minute detail about everything involving Hogwarts; only stopping when she started explaining to a now silent but rapt audience about Defence and her Grandmother interrupted.

"De-fence? Ow about Dak Arts? Do they teach you that, no?"

Athenia fell silent, unsure what her Grandmother's reaction would be if she told the truth which was: no, they didn't teach the Dark Arts.

"No Dak Arts?" Her Grandmother seemed revolted by the thought, "Wot would Jason say? To ear that granddaughter of my own...knows nothing of Dak Arts..."

Vega suddenly broke into rapid Romanian, speaking solely to Flynn who nodded solemnly before he himself turned to Athenia, making the eleven year old tremble under his gaze; her fear increasing as he pointed his finger at her,

"You learn Dak Arts. Understood?"

"Yes sir." The answer was meek and timid as Athenia pushed herself back against the chair.

"Dark Arts is necessary to get good husband," Andre, the best at English pronunciation, though not proper grammar, broke through; "You want good husband, no?"

The look on his face reminded her of her uncle Rod in his foulest mood and Avatar when she had returned from the forest mixed together.

Andre wagged a long slender finger in her face,

“You no find good husband if you no know Dark Arts...Damien find you husband; heir and head find husband.”

To Athenia his bad grammar took the edge off his anger though Damien didn't help by grinning smugly and giving his opinion, slipping easily into the irritating younger brother role,

“Yeah Thea; just think: I could make an arrangement with Draco Malfoy...”

“You wouldn't dare,” Athenia snapped at her brother, ignoring the death glare from Vega as the usual sibling rivalry came to the surface.

“Course I would,” Damien shot back as he rose to the usual banter of wits, “After all,” he added sweetly to his sister, “I am the heir and when I become the head I will be able to pick anyone I choose for you: so really you should be sucking up to me in case I decide to marry you off to, say, Crabbe maybe?”

It was said lightly with no malice behind it but Athenia rose to the bait anyway,

“Why don't you just shove yourself up Merlin's pants?”

“As the heir I command you to do it first.”

Athenia's scream of frustration was killed instantly by Flynn's icy glare at her nerve to speak to the family's beloved heir in such a way.

“However I'll forgive you for your language and take mercy on you,” Damien continued in his most patronizing voice. The sentence, to Athenia, was like a verbal, condescending pat on the head.

Athenia, knowing what was expected, bowed her head and said through gritted teeth,

“Thank you.”

Flynn’s glare lessened slightly but it didn’t stop him from losing his temper,

“Go to room now, disobedient girl: girls no talk to heir that way.”

Athenia left the room, her shoulders sagging as she fought back the tears that threatened to fall at the unfairness of it all.

Sure, she shouldn’t have rose to Damian’s bait and reacted the way she did but the thought didn’t take away the sting of her uncle’s biased judgement; closing the dinning room door she made her through a few long winding corridors and up a set of cold stone steps that led to a long draft corridor with three doors on the left hand side: the furthest one leading to the vast library. She had been so angry she hadn’t realised that she had taken a wrong turning in this castle which seemed to be a maze of corridors.

Realising that the family would be downstairs for a while, she decided that this would be a perfect time to check out any books that spoke about the Stone...but then it was forbidden for any female to go into a place of learning without permission and a male escort...ah, sod it!

Slipping into the far room recklessly, Athenia held back a gasp at the room’s magnificent collection of books, ranging from the very new to the very dusty and tattered books.

The room itself was huge and circular with huge fifty foot bookshelves lining the walls, ladders on rails running round each book shelf. A balcony with what looked like more books ran halfway round the room with a spirally staircase going up. Two deep blood red comfy chairs sat in front of a roaring fireplace which was the only source of light in the room. Tall stain glass windows featuring blood scenes from the bible dotted the walls, the story of Gideon pulverizing the opposing army, of Jesus on the cross and many more revealing, distorted, the snow storm outside.

Closing the door Athenia crossed the floor and started scanning the books, realising quickly that what she was looking for would be hidden amongst the many books written Romania or other ancient languages.

However Athenia didn't give up, sure that if the family housed so many books in various languages then they had to have some books in English.

After an hour of searching, she was beginning to feel a bit restless as thoughts of going to her room for safety reasons began to crowd her mind: the thought of being caught in the library on top of everything else petrified her, but still for reasons unknown to her, she kept on searching.

Within half an hour of remaining in the library, her efforts were rewarded when she found five dusty volumes on Genealogy, Dark Arts, Potions and Alchemy. Taking the books into her arms she tried not to cough as a cloud of dust rose from the old volumes.

Holding her breath Athenia crept to the door, somehow managing to open and close the door with an armful of books as she hurriedly made her way back to her room, reaching it within five minutes rather than the four hours it felt as the chime from the family's large clock in the entrance way resounded magically throughout the whole castle: once, twice, thrice...all the way to nine chimes.

Placing the books in her trunk at the bottom underneath all her school books, the enormity of stealing books from the men of the manor's domain came crashing down and immediately she thought of taking them back.

However she stopped as footsteps sounded from outside her door and Athenia threw herself on the bed, lying face down and breathing heavily as if she had cried herself to sleep.

The door opened and a candle was shone into the room; Athenia concentrated on keeping her breathing deep and heavy, her face buried into the bed half suffocating herself.

Whoever it was spoke in rapid Romanian and fear coursed through Athenia's veins at the sound of Flynn's voice; her fear was heightened as she heard Aries and Andre's replying tone.

However despite not knowing what they had said the door closed immediately and Athenia waited until the footsteps died away before sitting up cautiously in the near dark.

Her room was modest in size and, like most of the other guest rooms, circular with a large carved four poster bed and deep blue silk coverings. A beautifully carved chest sat at the bottom of her bed with a roaring fireplace near the door. Blue rugs lined the stone floor and a few torches threw shadows into the corners of the room. A window seat looked out into the snow storm, the small green pieces of glass obscuring any decent view she might have had of the surrounding landscape.

Her own trunk sat in the corner, having closed itself in her haste to get to bed.

Slipping off her bed she crept over to the trunk and opened it carefully, wincing as the hinges creaked. Taking a deep breath she retrieved the first book she had swiped and, closing the trunk, crept back to bed. The light coming from the fire was bright enough to allow her to read the book.

A book on Dark Arts...if her family wanted her to become adept in the Dark Arts then she would learn in the Dark Arts and sod the consequences.

Opening the book at a random page she was thrown when a illustration of the box, her box, jumped out at her; taking up a whole A4 page.

It couldn't be, could it? Jumping from her bed, the potential danger from her family forgotten, she retrieved the box from her trunk and placed it on her bed, comparing the picture to the real thing.

Yes, there was no doubt at all that it was the same box. However the strangest thing was that on the opposite page was another illustration; this time of a man whom Athenia had seen before; back at Hogwarts in the box itself....roaming her eyes over the page she took in all the detail of the man and the box;

Heath Vlad was the tyrannical ruler of Transylvania in 500BC. He is best known for his murder of the thousand goblins three years after he took the throne. His exact birth date is unknown, and the time he was imprisoned in the box is estimated to be fifteen years into his death reign.

Among all the Dark Lords over the centuries there was none more feared than Heath Vlad; his favourite method in torture was the fearsome Cruciatus Curse as well as disembowelling his enemies, leaving the heart intact and getting his physicians to sew them back up; and placing them on a stage, still alive for all to see as an example, and would let them stay there under the roasting sun until they died slowly and painfully from sunburn, sunstroke, ultimate pain or dehydration...

Athenia felt sick but kept on reading,

Heath himself took an interest in medical research. His main interest was mostly identical twins, dissecting them with no anaesthetic to see what abnormalities created them to look the same.

Athenia turned the page, feeling sicker with every word she read. Maybe there was a valid reason this book was kept in the man's domain rather than in the parlour which housed a few books, mainly light fiction, which the woman of the house were allowed to read.

However her attention was caught by some strange words at the bottom of the page,

Ostendo sum vestry specialis.

Latin? Then it was probably a spell, and from the contents of the book it was a dark spell...but there was no instructions on wand movement or any particular way to say it...Athenia agonised over saying the

words out loud, before her curiosity won out and she whispered the words to herself, feeling the power that came from merely saying them.

But the curiosity quickly passed as a feeling of insane happiness which had nothing to do with her coursed through her and the box turned a violent blue and began to shake and bounce of its own accord.

The box landed on the floor a few feet from her bed and Athenia watched, holding her breath, while silently praying that she hadn't done something that she would immediately regret; and let out her breath when the box went back to normal.

Starting to get up to retrieve it she was thrown against the wall the box lid flew off and a wave of intense dark acidic like power swept through the room; breaking the ancient windows but somehow preventing the snow from coming in.

Athenia watched as the box glowed brightly, different colours running into each other; blinding her with the sheer neon light.

Covering her eyes with her hands she allowed instincts to take over and stumbled towards her bedside table, grabbing up her wand and holding it tight; not sure exactly what she would do as she only knew a few spells, just knowing that holding her wand made her feel a lot safer.

What happened next as the room filled up with light, somehow managing to retain the dark feeling, kept her rooted to the spot, unable to move.

A head was coming out of the box, dark wavy hair followed by a cruel, handsome, sharply chiselled face. The eyes slanted and narrowed as the head was followed by a tanned neck, followed by broad powerful shoulders and a lean athletic body dressed in bright colourful robes...Athenia tried, and failed to scream as the body was lifted up by an unseen force until it was totally out, the lid slamming shut as the man who matched the illustration in the book of Heath Vlad, hovered a few feet in the air as the glow in the room died down.

The sound of the storm outside raged violently through the broken windows, the wind sending shards of broken glass across the room cutting into her arms and sending thin rivers of blood down her arms and face. However no snow came in; it was if an invisible wall was in place, protecting them from the worst of the storm.

Heath hovered back down to the ground and took a few minutes staring at himself, admiring his physical body that he had been deprived of for so long...clenching and unclenching his hands before pulling from his pocket a long thin yellow yew wand and twirling it between his fingers.

“So long...” his use of English surprised Athenia, even if it had a slight accent behind it.

Suddenly his eyes snapped up from admiring his wand and met hers; and in that instant Athenia knew true paralysing fear, knew she was seeing the darkest aspect of humanity possible...

“A child...now I understand...a child had to set me free; a child of my blood line...” musical and light his voice carried over to her, casting a spell of its own.

Athenia found herself light and dizzy butu forced herself to focus on the dire situation at hand.

“Power...” he was next to her now, crouched down and running a finger down her cheek lightly. His inability to finish sentences, or maybe he just didn’t want to, un nerved her as it made his intention far from clear.

He was about to say something else, keeping his eyes locked on hers when a sudden banging on the door diverted their attention.

“Athenia! ATHENIA! OPEN DOOR NOW!” Flynn’s voice carried through the great oak door as he banged his fist against it in an effort to open the jammed door.

Heath raised an eyebrow, sensing that this man was powerful in a thuggish kind of way, but not of his blood like the child in front of him...narrowing his eyes he stood up though in his heart he knew that until his full powers were returned after centuries of having them zapped by the hideous prison, he would be unable to fight.

"We will meet again little one; be sure of that," he spoke to Athenia, before flying out into the storm.

Athenia watched him go, her face sheet white with large fear filled eyes filling her face as she tore her attention away from the window and the storm which howled freely throughout the room. Her wand was pointed uselessly at the floor as the door suddenly opened in and Flynn, Andre and Aries fell through the doorway, landing in a heap.

Flynn was the first to recover and through the howling wind Athenia saw his fury and managed to understand the words that roared from his mouth, which somehow just managed to not get lost in the wind,

"WHAT DID YOU DO?"

Thanks guys, please review x

The sun rose on Christmas day over the glistening white landscape of Romania, created by the snow storm the night before which had ceased sometime early in the morning when everyone but one person in the castle had been asleep.

That one person had been Athenia whom had been up all night in the room she had been reallocated until her own room could be fixed; the reason being a few; the pain from her punishment which had gone on all night, ending at one in the morning and because of the nightmares that she had whenever she closed her eyes.

The story she had told Flynn was that yes, she had taken a book from the library without permission and tried to cast a spell, unsuccessfully, merely by reading it out. Because the book she had taken was filled with spells that didn't require a wand, just feeling behind your voice Flynn didn't think anything of it; he was also secretly pleased that she had taken an interest, and even attempted, the Dark Arts. What did anger him though was the fact that she had gone into the library without permission and stolen a book.

It was virtually unforgivable to her uncles mind, Athenia reflected; if it hadn't been for her begs for forgiveness mixed in with her pleads to be taught the Dark Arts (which although was genuine to a point, it was more to try and sweeten her uncle up) he would probably still be punishing her now.

Her room had been totally ruined by the storm: the ancient stain glass windows which had been in place since the twelfth century, smashed completely. The fireplace had cracked apart from the impact of the Dark Magic and her bed was in tatters. The room was also soaking from the snow storm. The only thing that seemed to have evaded wreckage was her trunk and the box...the empty box that sat on her bedside table in one of the grander rooms.

Although her room before had been modest, it hadn't been one of the more grander suits reserved for people like Damien and Vega...or important guests like the minister for magic of Romania; but despite this she had liked the modesty and warmth that came from the room.

The castle had other rooms like that, of course, but Damien, the O So Irritating Little Brother, had gotten involved; saying that as his sister she should have one of the spare suits near his own rooms up in the West Wing. Athenia had thought about disagreeing, of course, but as she had already disagreed with her brother before hand, and taking into account the amount of trouble she was in already she wisely kept her mouth shut while Damian stood by, smug in the knowledge he had just irritated his elder sister again and come out of it smelling of roses...well until they were alone, then maybe he wouldn't be smelling so great.

Contrary to the popular belief in the Slytherin common room Athenia disliked over the top grandeur décor, preferring more the more simplistic touch as it did more to a room than statues in the corner, carpets, rugs, paintings on the walls as well as cluttered with ornaments of various sizes.

The room she had been allocated certainly was that: four rooms of her own: an adjoining marble decorated bathroom with a huge bath tub, shower, toilet and sink all in white and silver marble. Next to this was the bedroom which was decorated in creams and golden colours; rugs covered the cream carpet with loungers opposite a large fire. This room led out into her private sitting room which held a few books of its own, loungers, cabinets while ornaments dotted every surface. Off this room was a small dining room where she apparently could dine by herself if she so wished; not that she could as her presence was required downstairs in the main dinning room every night.

But despite all this she hadn't told anyone about Heath as the image was imprinted on her mind, the way he had touched her cheek with his ice cold hands; the wired things he had said...somewhere in her mind she knew she should tell someone, but then that would get her into even deeper trouble and probing would be done, into the box and where she had gotten it; that would drag her uncle Rod into it and somehow she knew that if that happened she would never see England or Hogwarts again, kept here forever by the Romanian authorities as her uncle was branded a 'bad guardian'. Because it was her mother's old box Ella would be dragged into it too and it was

thought of her mother's memory being besmirched, more than anything, that finalised her decision not to tell anyone.

She was broken from her musings by the searing pain in her back as she moved slightly in an effort to get more comfy in the duck-feather mattress.

Giving it up as a bad job Athenia swung her legs out of bed, trying not to cry out from the pain before stumbling over to the huge wardrobe where her clothes had all been hung up neatly.

Because it was Christmas Athenia pulled out her best Sapphire blue robes which her uncle had bought for her before they went over to Romania.

The door opened and Lewis and Damien slipped through,

"It is polite to knock, you know," she responded to them as she opened the curtains to reveal huge windows that reached from floor to ceiling, letting in the light. The fire had dimmed down during the night and as Athenia threw open the windows to let some fresh air in the last of the fire went out from the cold crisp clean air.

Damien shrugged,

"Just wanted to see how you were...and Merry Christmas to you too..."

"Santa came, Thea," Lewis piped up excitedly, betraying the true reason for their early morning call, "Damien and me went down to the parlour and he's come Thea...he really has!"

Athenia smiled at her younger brother,

"I'm coming, don't worry. Just let me wash and get dressed and I'll come down..."

"No one's up yet...Grandmother said last night that she wasn't going to get up any later than nine so we thought that we could have a small pre party together," Damien offered.

“She wouldn’t get up even for her beloved heir?” Athenia asked in mock horror. Damien’s took on a very solemn expression as he spoke his next words,

“No, I assured her that as the heir I took my responsibilities seriously; and allowing the woman to get their beauty sleep was one of them...”

Lewis sniggered as Athenia proclaimed,

“What do you mean your responsibilities? You’re ten!”

“So? It gives us a few hours together doesn’t it?”

Her brother’s ability to manipulate the family members over here never ceased to amaze her.

“Let me get dressed and I’ll be right out.”

She walked into the bathroom and had a quick shower before getting dressed, letting her wet hair flow free down her back. Walking back into the room she saw that Damien had closed the window and was relighting the fire as Lewis lay on a lounge watching him with rapt attention as Damien dictated what he was doing,

“Then you blow it a bit, let a bit of air catch hold of the fire and...wala! You have a fire going.”

Upon Athenia’s questioning look Damien added, almost reverently;

“Aleric taught me.”

Resisting the urge to roll her eyes Athenia sat herself down next to Lewis, happy that she was able to spend some time with her brothers before her relatives had to ruin it; as irritating as both boys could be some times, she still loved them dearly.

“Uncle Flynn was talking last night about the procession...” Damien started only to be cut off by Athenia’s shudder.

“What Thea? Don’t you like being watched and worshipped,” he made his voice go deep and heavily accented like their uncle Flynn’s, “by common folk in village.”

Athenia gave a small laugh,

“It’s just the pretence I don’t like,” she muttered as she shifted her weight slightly, wincing as the pain in her back made itself known to her.

Damien shrugged as if her concerns were nothing,

“So what? A bit of acting never hurt anyone...I mean everyone does it; uncle Rod does around other ministry officials; you know: when he’s being really polite? Aunt Bellatrix does it around her mother when Mrs Black comes over...other people do it in front of uncle Rod and I’m betting people at Hogwarts do it too.”

Athenia reflected on how true this statement and said so, immediately wishing she hadn’t when Damien got his smug happy look.

Ignoring him and his ego she turned to Lewis who was watching the banter with a smile on his face; the first one she had seen since they had arrived here. Although Lewis never got into any trouble with the family he wasn’t exactly doted on either; a more accurate term to use would be ‘overlooked in every way’; or ‘left out of everything.’ At least with her the family treated her like they treated the other females; like cattle ready to be sold off; though unlike the other females she was constantly criticized and fault was found in everything she did. With Lewis, the second son, they were just indifferent.

“Well we wouldn’t want you to perspire from the sheer effort of acting the part of the revered heir, would we dear brother?” she bit back and Damien smiled condescendingly at her,

“Of course we wouldn’t. As the heir I need others, mainly my siblings, to perspire for me.”

Athenia held back a growl of frustration but Lewis laughed happily as he watched the banter.

“It’s not funny Louie...”

“Yes it is...” suddenly his young face became troubled, “...you’re not going to fall out, are you?”

This was typical Lewis. Loyal to both siblings to the end, he couldn’t stand conflict between them.

“Yeah we are Louie,” Damien answered off handily, “I can’t stand Athenia and am thinking about disowning her...”

Lewis blanched and Athenia scowled,

“Don’t tease him like that Damien; it’s not funny,” Athenia snapped at her brother.

“Can do what I want; I’m the heir remember?”

“NO you can’t,” Athenia snapped back.

“Can.”

“Can’t...”

“Stop it,” Lewis pleaded, placing his hands over his ears.

Scowling at the thought of being wrong Athenia turned the conversation towards what they thought they had gotten for Christmas.

Lewis looked doubtful but Damien jumped in with everything he thought was under the tree for him, Lewis gradually getting more and more confident in his ideas until they turned ludicrous when he announced that the big parcel was a live unicorn.

But despite this they all had a good laugh, each becoming more and more outlandish in their ideas until the clock struck ten o’clock and a knock at the door came, along with a heavily accented voice,

“Athenia...you decent, yes?”

The sound of Flynn’s voice sent shivers up Athenia’s spine but she managed to call back,

“Yes sir.”

The door opened and Flynn entered followed by Vega, dressed in a vulgar green dress. All three siblings stood up as a mark of respect when they entered.

“I thought Damien here, no?”

Athenia had no idea what that was supposed to mean but Damien stepped in and, bowing to his uncle to soften him up;

“You were right uncle; I am here. We came to wake Athenia up for the procession thorough the village...”

“Town, Damien, it is town,” Vega said reprovingly as she admired herself in a mirror hanging from the wall, playing around with her powdered hair.

“Sorry ma’am,” Damien muttered quietly before inspiration struck him and he offered his arm to his grandmother, regardless of how ridiculous it looked having a ten year old offer his arm to an eight nine year old. But despite this their grandmother smiled indulgently at Damien and took the offered arm, walking out of the room with Lewis trailing behind, leaving Flynn and Athenia alone in the room.

All of sudden the room shrunk under Flynn’s powerful presence and she stared at him as he stared at her, his head cocked to the side slightly as he considered her; the look on his face thoughtful. When he did speak it was quietly with no malice, which made a change, his face breaking out into a massive smile (which somehow shook Athenia more)

“Thinking Athenia, and we decided you no understand experimenting; experimenting with Dak Arts is Rivers special: you do well under

tutorial with me. Dark arts need special skills to experiment, spell one work not with other, but number three; yes?"

Athenia tried not to look blank at his less than easy to understand English. Flynn looked annoyed at her lack of response and started moving his hands in wild gestures to get his point across

"One spell...no work with other spell two but work with three spell..."

"You mean the dark curse I used did not mix well the other curse I used; but it would have worked very well if I had used a difference curse?"

"Yes, yes!" he looked triumphant.

"And your going to teach me?" she asked, missed feelings of reluctance and extreme ecstasy at such an unexpected gift.

"Andre and me, lots of thought; for best you."

Athenia managed to translate this: her two uncles had discussed it and decided that a tutorial would be best for her to prevent any more accidents.

He held out his arm to her unexpectedly, much the same way that Damien had offered his arm to his grandmother. Athenia smiled as she took it,

"Thank you uncle, for the gift," as she was sure that was what it was meant as. Women were not usually taught like this in the family; they watched, observed the men, practised and learnt the spells that way.

"Rodolphus no teach you proper curses; we teach you."

So it wasn't a gift, more a dig at the Lestranges. Athenia didn't point out that the reason her uncle hadn't taught her any dark curses was purely because she hadn't asked.

Making a mental note to do so when she got home she followed her uncle down the stairs to the main entrance hall and outside into the

courtyard where a line of royal looking carriages pulled by those wired milky eyed skeletal beasts she and Damien always saw but which she had found out over the years were actually quite harmless.

Athenia had no idea why she and Damien could see them when Lewis couldn't but she didn't make a deal out of it. Allowing her uncle to help her into the front carriage, which was closed top, silver in colour with intricate black designing; where her brothers and Grandmother were sitting on the blood red velvet seats. Sitting opposite Damien she let Flynn close the door, watching as he made his way to the carriage behind them, a traditional black carriage which would hold Flynn, Otila, Andre and Olga. Despite the largeness of the carriage on the outside, the inside was quiet small, allowing no more than six people to sit in the confined space.

Once the whole family, Christmas Relations and all, were all in various carriages; the further away you were related, the further back in the procession line you were, the line moved forwards at a steady pace, allowing Athenia to look out of the curtained window at the passing scenery.

They reached the town in no time at all and Athenia lay back in seat, wishing for the entire world that she was back in bed, rather than sit back and watch the envious faces of the people who lived on the estate. It really was like going back in time, she thought; serfs coming out to pay tribute to their lord.

Their lord being a ten year old boy, she thought with some amusement as she watched Damien's careful reaction to their calls; the easy way he smiled at some, waved at others: all under their grandmothers watch. Suddenly it occurred to her that maybe Damien had it worse than her: while the only thing expected of her was to make a good marriage and have lots of babies to carry on the Rivers line, Damien would be the head of the family and had to represent everything the family stood for which morally wasn't a lot.

It was at that moment; watching her grandmother watch her brother, she realised that if anyone was the loser in this game of family chessboard, it was her brother as he had been trained from birth to act a certain way, be a certain way...never to be himself and in a way

the thought that only Lewis and herself had seen her brother for who he really was more saddening than anything she had ever come across.

A random thought flitted into her head and she found herself shocked not only by the question but also by her answer,

Is family really worth comprising your free will, to be moulded to fit a image other people want rather than the image you want?

No, it's not!

Shocked at her mutinous thoughts she crushed the feeling of mutiny immediately, staring at her hands in the submissive way her uncle approved of in woman.

Denial is an awful thing which can take people many years to overcome and Athenia was no closer in overcoming her denial than she had been in the past; but in a way it felt like the worst kind of betrayal as she turned her head to look out of the window, forcing herself not to look at her brother as the realisation of her family's moulding of her brother fought with her 'turn a blind eye' attitude.

That was the first rule if you wanted a peaceful life with the Rivers in Romania: turn a blind eye.

But it was Christmas, and Christmas was a time of hope and happiness. Breaking herself off from her depressive thoughts she forced herself to take in the tiny town, or as it would be considered in England: a village.

Wooden huts and one up one down houses lined each side of the winding road. The people stood by the side of the road calling and cheering despite the cold. Others were huddled into doorways for warmth against the bitter cold. Even though the storm had died Athenia could tell another one was brewing.

But something was wrong!

They had reached the end of the road and the carriages had stopped. The carriages never stopped: they carried on in a complete circle round the town until they reached the road leading back to the manor. It was a tedious hour of her life but it never failed to provoke the green-eyed monster in Lyra, for some reason.

But now they had stopped and Athenia wasn't the only person who stuck their head out of the carriage to see what the hold up was.

The problem was, bang smack in the middle of the road, two sisters; identical twins to be exact with dark stringy hair, tanned skin and closed eyes. When they opened them Athenia was close enough to see the milky colour of the eyes: the sisters were both blind.

But despite this they held an aura of magic that enchanted her. Damien had jumped down from the carriage to follow his uncle Andre who had come storming out of his carriage, his face a mottled puce at the interruption.

Lewis also followed his brother and Athenia followed them, ignoring her grandmother's shrill instruction for her to get back in the carriage.

As she got closer she saw Andre yelling both to the groom who was holding the mysterious horses that pulled the carriage, calming them down to the two women.

The only difference was, was that neither woman, unlike the groom, were taking any notice.

Athenia had read somewhere that blind people were usually gifted with strange powers which made up for their lack of sight and it was the strange words that came out from each sister's mouth, like a language that didn't exist in the human race but existed in some other world, that held Athenia paralysed on the spot as they wafted over her.

The power in the air as the mumblings got louder became intoxicating and just as suddenly a sit had started it stopped, leaving everyone frozen; almost as if time itself had stopped. Everyone that is, except for the three siblings, who stood together watching the two ladies.

One started to speak in a voice which sounded like a thousand people speaking at once. As cool as this seemed to Athenia she was disappointed when the lady spoke in Romanian; but was happy when her sister translated it into English in the same thousand voices speaking voice.

“Thrice copii , Nume de running apă each taking lor own patetic.

Unul care merge ei own way lit by . ongoing lumină ; alt cloaked înăuntru darkness staying pentru . upcoming meci.

. al treilea is la spre remain loyal throughout . toaletă și fibros : și acesta este this copil that voință a voi scimbare . course de viață.

. choices și decisions , . consequences care a veni despre , voință a voi chnage . nume engraved înăuntru istorie și . devisions voință a voi remain throughout.”

“Thrice children, Name of running water, each taking their own path.

One going her own way, lit by the ongoing light; another cloaked in darkness, staying for the upcoming fight.

The third is to remain loyal, throughout the toil and strife; and it is this child that will change the course of life.

The choices and decisions, the consequences which come about, will change the names engraved in history and the divisions will remain throughout.”

Then, two things happened. The first was that the very fragments of time and space seemed to shatter and repair as the two woman turned into two balls of light, growing brighter and brighter until the light was blinding. However it wasn't like Heath coming out of the box. The light sent a feeling of security and lightness through Athenia, and a glance at her brothers told her they felt it too. The light enfolded her, filling her with images of her past, present and what she assumed was her future. Only if this was her future it was a pretty awful one as Granger seemed to be in a lot of the images. However despite this

nothing was clear, the images blurred around the edges, like a broken puzzle with lots of pieces missing the picture made no sense.

The second thing that happened was that the balls of light flew up towards the sky and exploded, letting gold glittery sparkles fall gently down to earth just as time resumed and Flynn stood there, for once unable to find anything to say at the scene before him: three gold dust covered children, each glowing brightly in various ways, standing in a wonky line. In front of them a large crater had burnt into the road where the sisters had stood.

Damien's comment however cut through the now silent, staring crowd: summing it up nicely.

"That was the coolest thing I have ever seen; even better than Quidditch!"

Thanks guys, please review. Again I'm sorry if anyone out there speaks Romanian and finds the translations lacking. Thanks again x

Platform nine and three quarters was buzzing like usual, people shoving and pushing to get good compartments while tearful goodbyes were held between parents and children from windows. Owls hooted, cats meowed and somewhere a dog barked.

Athenia stood next to her uncle taking this in lazily, once again sneering at the tearful goodbyes while ignoring the pang in her heart until...

“Athenia!”

Athenia turned round and smiled when she saw Neville running up to her, an elderly stern looking woman taking up his rear.

“Neville!”

Neville had reached them,

“How was your Christmas?”

“Oh you know, the same really,” she said offhand. Neville nodded before turning to Rodolphus who had switched his attention to the two friends,

“Mr Lestrangle,” he said, taking Rodolphus’s outstretched hand, seeing Athenia mouth ‘suck up’ behind his back. “It’s an honour to finally meet you.”

“No Mr Longbottom, the honour is all ours...please, call me Rodolphus.”

Neville had no idea what to say to this so replied,

“Then call me Neville.”

Rodolphus smiled his usual strained smile,

“Neville. I hear you are tutoring my niece in Herbology...yes, I was pleased to see her grades improving in that area.”

“Erm yeah, it’s nothing really,” Neville muttered, embarrassed just as his Gran came up,

“Neville, don’t go running off like that; haven’t I told you a hundred times?”

“Yes Gran,” Neville muttered, turning bright red and earning a raised eyebrow from Athenia,

“Augusta, so nice to see you again.”

“Rodolphus, Rabastan...yes it has been a while. How is your mother; recovering well in St Mungo’s I hope? I was sorry to hear about her catching Dragon Pox.”

“Mother is, sadly, going downhill; though of course St Mungo’s are doing everything they can I’m afraid we must accept the inevitable.”

“Of course...yes I remember her at Hogwarts; Ravenclaw wasn’t she?”

Rodolphus nodded,

“Yes, yes; bright woman...anyway, yes I am sorry to hear that about her. I’ll make sure I visit here during the week.”

“I’m sure mother would appreciate that; she always spoke highly of you Augusta.”

“Indeed; as I would her...anyway, Neville, come here and give me a kiss and get on the train otherwise you’ll be late.”

Neville dutifully gave his Gran a kiss on the cheek, turning slightly red as Athenia was given a brief embrace by her uncles and aunts. Damian and Lewis gave her a slightly longer hug. Ever since the procession when Lewis had been called into the study, only getting back to his room hours later covered in cuts and bruises, crying, they had all vowed that, regardless of any stupid prophecy, they would stick together and protect one another.

"I'll write every day," she promised, making Lewis's face light up but Damian scowled,

"Not every day! You'll run out of things to write about and it's a waste of parchment to describe the exact shade of such and such's nail varnish."

Athenia glared playfully at him before turning to her uncle who had sent Lyra and Aleric off and was waiting to have a last word with her,

"I don't want any trouble from you this term Athenia...understood?"

"Yes sir."

"Very well. Goodbye Athenia, and always remember that you are a Rivers first, Athenia last."

Athenia nodded, her mask sliding into place as Rodolphus nodded both to her, then to the Longbottom's before, taking the boys arms in each hand, apparated along with his wife, brother and sister in law leaving Athenia alone on the platform next to Neville and his Gran.

Neville helped Athenia lug their trunks into an empty compartment and Augusta levered them up onto the overhead luggage rack,

"I will see you at Easter Neville; behave and goodbye."

"Goodbye Gran."

"So, really, how was Christmas?"

Athenia gave him an assessing look. Experience had taught her that Neville would never repeat anything said in confidence, and that he would be understanding if she were to tell him the truth; and didn't friends tell each other things?

Taking a deep breath she told Neville everything, minus a few details, and once she had finished, she felt like a huge weight had been lifted from her chest; Neville looked at her, goggling at what she had done,

"And your sure it was...him?"

"I don't know...possibly...yeah."

"We have to tell someone..."

"No we don't!" Athenia replied quickly,

"Yes we do...I mean if it was him then it could prove dangerous!"

"Neville...please understand; if anyone finds out I'll probably be carted off to Romania, I'll never see you again and mother..."

"But it's the h...honest thing to do," he stammered, beginning to break but holding to his guns with everything he had.

"Neville," her voice was sharp but it had a pleading undertone to it, "Imagine if it was your mum...if you knew that it was her name that would be dragged through the mud; imagine if you were taken away from your family to live abroad with no contact with England...please, I told you as a friend; please don't tell anyone."

She was already beginning to regret telling him as Avatar's words came back to her but, suddenly, he gave a small smile,

"Yeah...I can see your point..." his face turned serious, "I'd feel the same way if it were my mum...only if anything bad happens I am going to tell someone as it might save lives."

Stupid Hufflepuff

"Fine. But only if that happens."

Neville nodded his consent but was about to say some more on the subject but Athenia beat him to it by changing said subject,

"Did you find out anything about the stone?"

Neville shook his head,

“No...nothing. I mean it wasn't as if I didn't look; I even asked Gran but she had no idea...or said she didn't,” Neville finished unsurely.

“Right,” Athenia slumped back in a dejected way, annoyed at the dead end. She had hoped against hope that Neville would find something on it...

“What bout you; did you manage to look during your, shall we say, busy Christmas?” he joked.

“No...”

Just at that moment the trolley came along, laden as always with sweets of every type.

Athenia bought a few packets of Bertie Botts Every Flavoured Beans and two Chocolate Frogs. Neville bought a few Pumpkin Pasties and five Chocolate Frogs.

Athenia was looking at a suspicious green coloured Bean when the compartment opened and Granger came in, already in her school robes. Ignoring Athenia's warning glare, and Athenia in general, she sat down next to Neville and proceeded to talk,

“Hello Neville, how was your Christmas?”

“Yeah Christmas was good...not as eventful as Athenia's but...”

“If it is all the same to you Neville, I would rather my business wasn't broadcasted across the whole student body,” Athenia cut in sharply, annoyed at Grangers interruption.

“Sorry Thea,” Neville blushed and looked down,

“Well mine was brilliant...Grandma came over and she was ever so surprised about me being a witch; but of course she was pleased as well...she seems to share my parents view about magic and I'm glad, I was worried she would find it difficult to accept...”

“Most muggles do,” Athenia snapped ignoring Neville’s warning glare as she made the word ‘muggles’ sound like she was describing something dirty under her foot.

Hermione turned pink but she looked furious,

“What are you doing here Granger? I don’t believe either of us actually asked you to join us...”

“S...she can sit here if she wants Thea,” Neville managed, his face slightly red.

Athenia shrugged and pointedly moved away towards the open window, staring out as she focused on the passing landscape.

As Neville and Hermione talked together Athenia felt more and more uncomfortable. What if she were seen sitting with a mudblood...what if Aleric caught her? Making her decision she stood up just as Neville yelled excitedly,

“Thea look, I’ve found it...on Dumbledore’s card; Listen:

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

Currently Head master of Hogwarts. Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.”

“So?” Athenia snapped scathingly,

“When I asked Gran she mentioned something about Nicholas Flamel...”

“I’ve read about him,” Hermione jumped in,

“I’ll bet you have,” Athenia muttered though she sat down, interested to hear what this man had to do with the stone,

“He is an alchemist...he made the Philosophers Stone which is a stone that turns metal into gold and creates the elixir of life....”

Athenia scowled at Hermione, annoyed that a mere mudblood had out done her again. Athenia made a mental note to try extra hard this year, devoting her entire time to studying.

“So that’s what it is then,” Neville piped up excitedly, “That’s what Avatar is after!”

“Avatar?” Hermione asked, confusion lining her brow.

Athenia was about to tell her to mind her own business when Neville jumped in, explaining everything.

“But that’s terrible...we need to tell someone...”

“And who will believe us? Avatar holds too much sway in Pureblood Society; even if he gets suspended from his post then he’ll have a lot of backup from outside: he’ll get a fine at most; also if it becomes public that I was the one who ruined him then my status in society will just have committed suicide...”

“We can’t just let him...” Granger snapped back but was cut off by Athenia,

“We? Who asked you Granger? It’s me and Neville; and as for what we are going to do, well, that is none of your business...”

“Thea, if Hermione helps us then we’ll be able to find a solution more easily...I know your worried about what your family will think,” Neville hurried on, cutting through Athenia’s protests, “but honestly you don’t have to be seen with us...you can do background reading yourself, tell me and I’ll pass it on to Hermione...”

Athenia looked very unhappy with the situation, but it made sense. Three heads were better than two; and as long as she wasn’t seen with Granger, only Neville, that would be okay. She made this clear, ignoring Hermione’s hurt look and Neville nodded, knowing this was an improvement on her behaviour last term.

“Anyway, I’m going to get changed then look for Daphne...she owes me some money,” Athenia said to Neville who nodded, knowing this was the best he was going to get out of her.

By the time she had changed into her robes and found Daphne it was getting dark. The girls were sitting in a compartment along with Malfoy and Zabini. Athenia slipped into the packed compartment, sitting next to Zabini who smiled at her.

“Where have you been Athenia?” Lyra asked snidely,

“If you must know Lyra, I’ve been sitting with Neville, uncle Rod’s new acquaintance?”

Lyra gave a dark scowl and turned away as Daphne brought out a chessboard,

“We’ll probably be able to fit in one game before we get there...I’ve got better mind,” she added as Athenia started putting her pieces on the board.

Athenia just smiled,

“We’ll see.”

Pansy, Millicent, Draco, Zabini and Lyra were all talking about the Lestranger’s Christmas Eve Ball and Lyra’s voice gradually got more and more louder as she started describing the ice decorations and how well they complemented the wintery colours used.

Athenia, not taking her eyes from the boards, said in an almost bored way as she contemplated her next move,

“Sounds like a big success; just like the procession in Romania...oh, sorry Lyra, I forgot,” she replied looking up, “you weren’t there...oh, knight to F4. That is check Daphne, I believe.”

Daphne scowled and moved her king back a space as the door opened and Aleric opposed his head round; he seemed pleased that

Athenia was already in her robes but barked at the rest to get changed.

As they took the horseless carriages up to the school Athenia wondered briefly about those images she had seen in her mind after the prophecy had been given, about Granger and allowed herself to wonder for the first time if it would be she who would go her own way; because last term she would have died before working with a mudblood like her, and this term she was allowing it. Granted, she didn't like doing it, but she was doing it which was the real issue.

As they all took their places in the great hall Athenia wondered on how much she had changed since coming to Hogwarts and instead of dread she felt happier, as if she were finally being allowed to be herself.

Please Review, thanks x

Walking into the Slytherin common room always made Athenia feel quite lonely but happy in equal measure. Happy that she was in an environment that she was comfortable with and which could bring her back down to earth with a bump if she needed it; lonely because here in the common room she had no real friends; acquaintances and contacts certainly, but no friends. Daphne was the closest thing that could be termed a friend, and even then that was questionable as Daphne was the type to stab you in the back if it benefited her.

Though she was a good laugh and always up for a friendly, competitive game of chess, as well as tips when it came to bloody Herbology homework.

Speaking of Herbology, she and Neville were still doing their regular tutoring sessions and through them swapping information on what they had found out about the stone and discussing various ways to combat Avatar.

Most of these theories always ended up been thrown in the idea bin as they were ridiculous bordering on bizarre but it was good that they were at least thinking about doing something. However the reality was that they had no idea on overcoming two full trained wizards.

Though today her thoughts weren't on Avatar, nor were they on Granger who had outdone her on another test; no they were on her previous conversation with Neville as well as her agreement to what he had suggested,

"Athenia, Hermione said something which I think we should do?" Neville spoke hesitantly, as if unsure of her reaction.

Her reaction was to raise a sarcastic eyebrow,

"And what does miss mud...know it all Granger want me to do?"

Neville acknowledged her nearly-use of the word he hated, though he was pleased that she had not finished it; indicating that maybe she could change her views,

"She thinks, and I agree, that maybe we should visit Hagrid...you know, to thank him for saving us on Halloween..."

"Bit late don't you think?" the sarcasm dripped from her voice.

"Well, yeah...but better late than never right?" his face was hopeful and Athenia glared,

"When does miss high and mighty want to do this?"

"Friday; when we have a free period?"

Athenia stayed silent. Of course there was a hundred, to her mind, valid reasons why she would, no should, refuse such a preposterous offer...any yet he had saved them from certain death so a thank you wouldn't be to bad...if she wasn't seen of course, slipping out and walking down on her own under the pretence of just taking a walk to clear her head.

Athenia said as much to Neville who visibly brightened; clearly he had thought it would take much more to persuade her which did nothing to heighten her rapidly forming bad mood...what was wrong with her, why was she acting so...so soft?

But Neville's bright smile brought a warm feeling to her stomach which she didn't completely dislike so, suddenly unsure of how to carry on the conversation, especially when Neville said quietly, "Thank you Thea," she turned her attention back towards the Herbology book and Neville, realising she didn't want to carry on the conversation said simply,

"I'll go down with Hermione at the start of our free period. If you want to come down twenty minutes later that's fine. Now the Devils Snare can be combated in many ways," he changed the subject abruptly, both un-nerving and pleasing Athenia that he latched on so quickly...

Athenia broke from her thoughts by remembering that, once again, she had forgotten her Herbology books. As Neville had left before her there was little chance that he would have picked them up this time.

Growling quietly and earning some strange looks from some third years she turned round and left just as quickly as she had come, walking quickly up from the dungeons and into the main reception area, and up the main stairs heading towards the library.

Reaching said library she realised that the doors were locked and a clock chiming told her that it was in fact, after hours.

A loud meowing coming from round the corner made her freeze and the sudden appearance of Mrs Norris made her flee down another corridor and through a hidden door which looked like a wall, down a long corridor and hid herself in a deserted classroom.

Hiding under the desk she waited for fifteen minutes until the coats were clear before standing up and gasping...a mirror! A large gold gilded mirror in the corner with a dust sheet pooling round the bottom.

Taking a deep breath as curiosity overcame fear she stepped towards it and stood in front of the mirror: at first she could only see herself but then...she gasped as her brothers materialised next to her, Lewis holding her hand while Damian grinned playfully. Her family came next, the Rivers and the Lestranges, each smiling at her in a way she had never seen: the kind of unconditional love that spoke volumes about acceptance regardless of choices and love, lots of love openly given. Two people whom she hadn't seen since she was four were there also: her mother and father, each smiling at her kindly, their faces full of what she wanted most in the world: love.

Her family, all together with no walls, no resentment, no hatred between them: and most of all no death.

In the mirror Lewis squeezed her left hand and Athenia looked down, almost feeling it but not quite...no one was there though...her family were not behind her and her brothers were most defiantly not next to her...also her parents were dead but then...could this mirror be a way to look into the next world, she wondered as she took the dust sheet and sat down, making herself comfortable...but then her brothers weren't dead, and neither were her cousins, uncles and aunts on both sides...only her parents.

Ella smiled at her from within the mirror, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. Athenia held back a sob at the show of motherly love but continued to stare, transfixed.

How long she sat there staring at her family she had no idea but it was dawn's first light that alerted her to the fact that she had stayed out all night.

Cursing silently she got up, reluctant to leave image of her family but forcing herself away as she now felt the full impact of her sleepless night.

Glancing at her watch she realised that if she got back to the common room within fifteen minutes she could grab a few hours sleep before classes that is if she missed breakfast. If she didn't then she would grab at least one and a half hours sleep....glancing wistfully at the mirror one last time she slipped out of the classroom and silently made her way down to the dungeons and through the deserted common room. She was about to enter the dormitories when movement from behind a chair near the dimming fire made her freeze.

Turning round slowly she advanced to the chair with her wand out, tiredness forgotten now as curiosity and fear battled out in her mind, curiosity winning by a millimetre.

Walking slowly round the chair arm with her wand raised she got the fright of her life when a voice said,

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Jumping two inches off the floor from fright she landed back on the ground only to find a wand pointed at her throat; the owner of the wand none other than the stupid mudblood in her dormitory.

"Oh. You." Unenthusiastically on Athenia's part. The frown on Kate's face deepened and she jabbed her wand at Athenia's throat threateningly. From fear of being speared by the wand Athenia took a step back,

“Yes, me,” it came out a snarl, “And what I want to know is what are you doing up at this hour?”

“None of your business,” Athenia bit back, “and you better watch how you talk to me mudblood, because if my cousin hears...”

Kate snorted,

“Your cousin? Typical bullies; can’t take on someone on your own but you can with a pack behind you...or if you hide behind your cousin?” it was said cruelly, mockingly as all the hurt Kate had suffered since walking into this common room in September came flying back.

“Watch your mouth,” Athenia snarled, shoving her own wand at Kate; both girls holding a wand at each others throat in a criss-cross position it would have looked to an onlooker highly ridiculous; especially as neither girls knew any real spells...well, aside from the ones Athenia had learnt in Romania and which she was pretty sure were illegal both there and over here. So any use of those spells would leave some very nasty unwanted questions...so any other spells she knew? Crap, not a lot!

Unless you counted turning a matchstick into a needle then any legal hexes...well she didn’t know any, simple as that!

Neither did Kate for that matter, but she wasn’t about to let on.

“What do you want mudblood,” Athenia snarled, lowering her wand first which was shortly mirrored by Kate,

“Very original...you know, after a while the term ‘mudblood’ begins to lose it’s desired effect; especially if you are called ‘mudblood’ at least ten if not fifteen times a day. As for what I want, I’ve told you: what are you doing up at this hour?”

“I think a better question would be what are you doing up,” Athenia snapped back, tiredness making her grotty, “And I’ll call you what I want,” she finished immaturely.

Kate rolled her eyes and turned away deliberately from Athenia to stare back at the fire,

“If you must know,” Kate spoke deliberately and slowly, as if speaking to a very dim person, “I came down here because in case you haven’t noticed I don’t get on with your dear cousin; and I would much rather spend time here alone un-hassled rather than constantly awake in case I get cursed with one of your cousin’s creative spells.” Her tone dripped venom which should have warned Athenia not to tread any further.

However Athenia was tired, ratty and not at all bothered when it came to common sense and warnings; therefore making her quite dim from her lack of sleep which was quietly creeping up on her again. Her next words proved this,

“Well my dear cousin is, despite popular belief quite clever which stems from her pure blood...”

Crack!

Kate had lashed out, not with her wand but with her curled up fist and the next thing Athenia knew they were rolling around on the floor, scratching, clawing, pulling hair, racking nails down skin and screaming....loudly.

Athenia yanked away with three long red lines down her left cheek, blood pouring from her nose as well as a chunk of hair missing from her right side of her head.

Kate was panting heavily, her eye slowly blackening her eyes narrowed thinly which were sprouting daggers at Athenia as what seemed as the whole of Slytherin came flooding into the common room to see what the loud noise was about...

“I thought a Rivers was supposed to be a blue blood...if that’s true then why is your blood red like mine?”

Kate indicated the small beads of blood that were welling up along a long red mark on her arm where Athenia had clawed at it.

Athenia, tired and pushed beyond her limit, lost it and leapt at Kate only to be pulled back halfway by...Aleric!

Athenia looked up into his face, twisted up in anger.

However she summoned up all her Dutch courage which came from lack of sleep and stood up, shooting daggers at Kate,

“Don’t ever insult my ancestry again mudblood...”

“If you are going to insult me, at least use a variety of words rather than one as it gets old after a while...as I pointed out earlier,” Kate finished sweetly, making Athenia’s colour turn an interesting red.

“Why you...”

“Athenia,” Aleric snapped through, “Enough. And as for you,” he pointed at Kate, “I’ll deal with you personally for disturbing my sleep. Athenia get to your bed now, and don’t ever let me catch you up at this time or I’ll write to father about it.”

His voice was full of barely controlled anger, however Athenia was beyond caring now, so she shrugged and made her way to her bed, pushing past people in an effort to get to her room; finally managing to get through and walked towards the first year door.

Wrenching the door open with un-necessary force she stalked in and fell on her bed fully clothed, falling asleep almost immediately.

It seemed that she wasn’t asleep for more than five minutes when she was shook awake by a red head...a familiar red head...Daphne, that was it.

She stared at her room mate through a thick haze of sleep, trying desperately to remember where she was and what was going on.

Hogwarts, yes, and lessons...lessons...oh yeah, she was learning magic...Athenia bit back an insane desire to laugh from lack of sleep.

“Athenia, we have potions in twenty minutes...will you wake up?”

Athenia dragged herself up, still fully clothed and, disregarding personal hygiene, she picked up her bag and walked out of the common room closely followed by Daphne....

“Thea,” she hissed once they had exited the common room, dragging the girl into a hidden corner, and thrusting something in Athenia’s hand...

“What’s this?” Athenia asked stupidly while staring at the piece of parchment in her hand,

“A summons...the seventh years and prefects want to see you at 7.00 in whatever place it says.”

Athenia read the short neat scrawl,

7.00pm, Abandoned classroom on charms corridor.

Despite her lack of sleep Athenia swallowed the lump forming in her throat,

“What do they want to see me for?”

She remembered Avery’s words from his welcoming speech from September.

I personally will deal with the perpetrator...

“Probably for waking everyone up at five in the morning fighting with the mudblood...disturbing the older years sleep...are you mad?”

Probably, she reasoned as her sleep muddled brain struggled to find a reasonable explanation for what she did and even then a vague memory of her actual actions.

Daphne stared at Athenia’s stropy face with despair before grabbing her arm,

“Come on...potions?” she prompted to Athenia’s blank, lack of sleep induced look.

“Oh! Yeah...”

Following Daphne towards the Potions classroom she entered what she knew would be a very long day of lessons.

Thanks guys, please review x

The first thing Athenia saw when she awoke was a large collection of Bertie Botts Every flavoured beans on her bedside table.

Sitting up suddenly, Athenia had to pause as the earth started to move violently. Her head felt like it was being struck repeatedly with a heavy object as she struggled to remember what had happened.

The last thing she remembered was standing inside a circle of seventh years as her 'charges' were read out. Avery had gone on to say something about punishment and then....then five curses came towards her at once; pain like none other had shot through her body at the impact of Avery's curse mixed in with the hexes from the others.

The pain had reached its climax after a few minutes on the floor and she passed out from the burning pain in her muscles.

That was all she could remember from the previous night...was it the previous night? How long had she been out for?

The door to madam Pomfry's office flew open and she strode through, carrying three bottles of suspicious looking green and yellow liquids.

"Good. You're awake."

Madam Pomfry placed the small bottles on the bedside cabinet before picking back up the darkest green one and handed it to her to take.

Athenia eyed the liquid with deep suspicion but swallowed it anyway....spitting part of it back out again at the foul taste.

"Next one," Madam Pomfry said briskly, pouring the whole contents of the yellow liquid down her throat mercilessly, ignoring Athenia's suffering.

"Last time." Lighter green was picked up and Athenia immediately spoke,

"I'll take it." Under Madam's Pomfry's hawk like gaze, Athenia swallowed the foul liquid in one go, pulling a face at the end of it.

“Now,” Madam Pomfry continued, ignoring Athenia’s disgusted look, “The headmaster and the head of your house wishes to speak to you about what happened. When you were found in the corridor, you had traces of dark spells on your body.”

Athenia immediately denied it,

“I don’t know, I don’t remember anything.”

Madam Pomfry’s lips but she nodded anyway before turning around to go back to her office, leaving Athenia to dwell.

There was no chance she would grass up Avery and the other seventh years, but she doubted that Madam Pomfry would leave it at that either.

That meant she would have to say something, blame it on someone else...

The door opened and four boys in her year wearing the Griffindork robes trooped through, three boys with black hair and one with bright red hair. Athenia narrowed her eyes at them from her position on the bed, hoping that the venom in her eyes would act as a substitute of a wand.

Alas, it didn’t.

Madam Pomfry ran out from her office and gave an exasperated huff,

“Honestly Potter, I thought I had enough to deal with when it came to your father and his pranks...what on earth have you done?”

Potter hesitated as he spied Athenia in the bed before muttering, “Spell backfired,” before vomiting up some horrid green slugs.

Athenia immediately recoiled back into the headboard at the sight.

Letting out a few tutting noises, Madam Pomfry vanished the slugs led Harry over to the bed opposite Athenia, before conjuring a bucket out of thin air and giving it to him.

“I’ll have a look at what I’ve got, but really Potter I think the best thing is to let it run its course. Though just to be on the safe side I’ll have to keep you in over night.”

Athenia just glared. Madam Pomfry had made no remark about her being able to leave so she supposed she would just have to spend the night in the same room as Potter, with his two Black lap dogs (the black twins) and the gangly tag along, Weasley.

After trying, and failing, to prevent the flow of slugs Madam Pomfry was away back into her office, muttering about juvenile hexes leaving the Slytherin and Griffindors alone in the ward.

At first none of the Griffindorks said anything, just fussed over Potter before Black twin #1, as Athenia thought of him, said loudly.

“It is a shame that you’ll miss the whole weekend Harry, with only a Slytherin to look at.”

Athenia ignored him and laid back in her bed, staring forcefully at the ceiling; counting the tiles...one, two, three,

“Harry, is it true your dad is still rooting out death eaters in the ministry?” Black #2 asked, equally as loudly, “Maybe he should look closer to home; maybe in the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures department?”

Before Athenia could jump to the aid of her uncle’s honour she was suddenly struck with a wonderful, truly fantastic idea on who to blame for her injuries...

Potter was very advanced in hexes and jinxes, every one knew that, and they also knew he had it in for every Slytherin possible. What if...could she? Would she dare? But it was brilliant...and Avery would probably lay off her for getting the ‘annoyance Potter’ expelled if not suspended.

It was this fantastic idea that was developing at a rapid pace in her mind that kept her mouth shut.

Potter and the others carried on their loud conversation until Madam Pomfry came out to shoo them away.

Athenia rolled onto her side, bored beyond belief; she had had no visitors all day. The absence of Neville hurt especially; as she had thought that he at least liked her a little if not more.

By the time six o'clock came around and night had fallen the stupid Gryffindorks had returned and were laughing and joking about stupid immature boyish things. Weasley successfully managed to lose any previous, however small, respect she had for his family by trying to top the Black twin's farts.

Just as Black number 2 let one rip, disregarding hygiene completely, the door opened and Aleric strode in; pausing long enough to glare disgustedly at the boys before moving towards Athenia and drawing the curtain around her bed. He waved his wand wordlessly before turning to her,

"I am here to relay a message Athenia," Athenia nodded, already half expecting this, "your punishment is complete and for the moment you are off the hook, though you are treading on very thin ice with the older years so I suggest you keep your head down, obedience high in your priorities and try to stay out of Avery's way..." it was the closest he would come to say 'be careful', "Now, we need to discuss the situation as the headmaster, meddling old fool, has written to father in regards to the dark marks found on you...he wrote to me and I wrote back saying that it was probably just a small spat that got out of control with one of the older years..."

"But Aleric," Athenia spoke slowly, "That's not what happened..."

"Athenia..." Aleric warned.

"No...you see, Potter is here as well from a spell backfiring...it wasn't the older years..." she silently willed Aleric to understand the cruel smile that graced his lips told her he had picked up,

"The reason we fought was because he had been griping about death eaters and uncle Rod...I told him to shut up and the next thing I know I'm here in the hospital wing..."

"I see," Aleric responded, "Well, you understand that I will have to write to father about this new development. Uncle Lucius is on the board of governors...I am sure he will help when it comes to his notice."

Athenia smiled and lay back. For the first time since coming to Hogwarts Aleric ruffled her hair,

"Aunt Ella would be proud of how you've turned out Thea...She was very adverse to anyone who spoke ill of her family," Aleric said fondly.

The rest of the visit was filled with Aleric's memory of his aunt Ella with Athenia listening intently.

"...my seventh Christmas Uncle Jason and Aunt Ella came over. Grandma was there with the Malfoys...Aunt Ella made some remark which got Father grilling her about her years at Hogwarts when he wasn't there..."

He was there for an hour before looking at his watch and standing up,

"Well, as I said I will write to father immediately with this new development. I can assure you Athenia, that the name Potter won't be so respectable by the end of the week if not month. Oh, and Lyra sends her well wishes and this," he threw another large box of Bertie Box Every flavoured Beans her way, "I hope you get well soon," he added before an idea suddenly occurred to Athenia,

"Aleric," he paused by the door, "What day is it?"

Aleric turned round and raised a perfect eyebrow her way,

“Saturday; Why?” he added, noticing his cousin’s crestfallen look.

“N...no reason.”

Aleric nodded,

“Goodnight then.”

“Night.”

As Aleric left, the door to Madam Pomfry’s office burst open with surprising force and Athenia’s heart fell when she spied the three bottles with the same foul liquid she had taken that morning.

Swallowing the foul liquids and allowing the nurse to tend to Harry, Athenia opened one box of Bertie Botts Every Flavoured Beans and sorted through the coloured beans until she found a dark brown one.

Staring at it suspiciously Athenia decided to take the risk; popping it into her mouth she gagged painfully. Rather than the Chocolate she had anticipated, it was in fact Poo.

By Monday, Madam Pomfry allowed her to go, so long as she came back in the morning before breakfast and after diner to take the potions to help along her healing process.

Lessons dragged but she was pleased to see Daphne and Pansy fawn over her, saying that they had come but she was always asleep whenever she turned up. Lyra, however, said nothing.

Athenia cornered her after their last lesson of Transfiguration,

“Thanks for the sweets,” she muttered awkwardly.

“It’s fine. After all, you are my cousin...family stick together, right?”

Athenia felt that familiar stab of guilt in her stomach that came whenever she thought on how much she had changed,

“Yeah, they do.”

Lyra walked away, her coal black curls bouncing about her shoulders gracefully as she pushed her way through the thronging students.

“Miss Rivers,” Athenia turned round and saw McGonagall pushing towards her, “If you will come with me. The headmaster wants to see you in his study.”

Athenia followed the old woman against the flow until they reached the fifth floor and stopped in front of a gargoyle,

“Chocolate Frogs.”

To Athenia’s surprise the gargoyle leapt aside and McGonagall indicated she should jump onto the revolving staircase.

Stepping forward, she allowed the staircase to take her up with McGonagall behind her.

A large oak door stood at the top with an elaborate gold knocker. McGonagall rapped it and Dumbledore’s voice came floating through,

“Come in.”

McGonagall led her through with a tight face.

Athenia was taken aback though not entirely surprised to see her uncle and Mr Malfoy there...but so was Potter, sitting next to a red haired woman with a small child on her lap and a tall, messy haired man who’s face was tightened with fury.

“Miss Rivers please come in. Thank you Professor...you may go as I know you have a lot of marking to do,” Dumbledore smiled to take the edge of his words. Minerva nodded before leaving, in her cat form, making Athenia jump at the sheer unexpectedness of it all.

After the door closed Dumbledore spoke,

“Please Miss Rivers, take a seat. We are at present trying to work through what happened. If you could give us your version of this tragic story, I’m sure we can work something out.”

Athenia sat down in-between her uncle and Mr Malfoy and took a deep breath before starting,

“Well sir, it was on Wednesday when I missed diner because I had homework to finish...” she paused and looked at Dumbledore, continuing when he nodded, “I was walking down to the common room when Potter, the Blacks and Weasley jumped out from nowhere-” (they had done this before with her) “-and started taunting me and making cruel jibes about my family...”

“How so Miss Rivers?” Dumbledore’s voice had gone serious.

“Black implied that the Aurors should arrest my uncle for death eater activities.” It was true...to an extent.

“How rude of him, please continue...”

“I took offence and told him to get lost before beginning to turn away. I heard Potter yell a curse I didn’t know and the next thing I know I woke up in the hospital wing.”

“Indeed...”

“Headmaster, this is ridiculous. Harry has no knowledge of dark curses...how could he inflict curse on the girl that would leave her hospital bound for three and a half days? It’s absurd.” The man seemed furious and started to pace the small room impatiently.

“That is all very well Potter,” Mr Malfoy drawled, “But it all comes down to your son; where was he? Does he have an alibi? The simple answer, which we have established, is no he doesn’t. He was also hospitalized later that week for trying, and failing, to curse my own son...two first year Slytherins in the first week; surely Dumbledore, that shows motive if nothing else?”

“Frankly Dumbledore,” Rodolphus cut through savagely, “I am worried about my own children as well as my niece. I do not at the least appreciate getting a letter telling me that my own niece is in the hospital wing after sustaining nasty dark injuries...ever since Lucius and I have arrived you have been trying to let the Potter boy off; though even now with a first hand testimony of what happened you are still trying to say that the boy isn’t responsible. It raises concerns, headmaster...”

“I assure you Rodolphus, your son and daughter are completely safe; nor do I even suspect Harry of doing such a deed. Whoever did this to your niece will be found and punished...”

“But Dumbledore; Athenia has already told you who it was,” Mr Malfoy cut through, “You couldn’t possibly be implying that Athenia is a liar?”

“No Lucius that is not what I am saying...”

“Well by Merlin, that is what it seems you are saying,” Rodolphus snapped.

“Then why don’t you punish the boy? Set an example as to why the dark arts are not allowed at Hogwarts...”

Dumbledore sighed and closed his eyes, knowing he had been berated into a corner...

“Dumbledore...” James’s voice was pleading

“Please...” Lily had chipped in.

“I hoped it wouldn’t have to come to this, but I have a warrant here for Mr Potter’s immediate suspension from Hogwarts for two weeks; twelve signatures from the board of governors, my own included. I had hoped Dumbledore that we could agree on this civilly, but it seems not...”

“Yet despite what I chose to do Lucius, you already had the sentence well in hand,” Dumbledore observed mildly.

"I was prepared to make, shall we say, negotiations."

"I'm sure," Dumbledore replied, "You were." He turned to the Potters and it was with heavy regret in his voice that he spoke,

"Harry, I am afraid you are suspended for two weeks...please go back to the common room and pack your things; then come back here, you may use my fireplace to get home. I will follow as I have some business at the ministry."

His voice was gentle and kind but it didn't stop Harry from shooting a death glare in Athenia's direction.

Rodolphus watched the headmaster with narrowed eyes. Dumbledore had given in way to easily...something was not right....

"Thank you miss Rivers, if you would hurry off to dinner before it ends?"

One look at her uncle who nodded sharply, she hurried off and down the stairs; her head abuzz with what had happened. She had just got her second nemesis suspended....the thought buzzed through her brain while adrenaline coursed through her veins. She had just reached the main hall when Neville ran up to her, panting heavily with Granger right behind him.

"Athenia, we've found out what's guarding the stone...it's a Cerberus!"

Thanks guys, please review xxx

“What?” It was all Athenia could say to Neville’s statement.

“A Cerberus...Hagrid told us on Friday...well actually he let it slip...”
Neville carried on.

Her head so buzzed up with everything that had happened at Christmas in Romania to the Suspension of Potter that Athenia found it difficult to actually take the new information in.

“A...a Cerberus?” she managed before erupting, “a Cerberus...”
Athenia could see danger on the horizon and wanted to avoid it at all costs.

“Yeah, he also said that a tune, any tune will put it to sleep...”

Athenia just stared at Neville, whose smile slowly slid away,

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Recovering,” she snapped and was slightly pleased to see Neville blush at her statement before a thought occurred to her,

“Dumbledore’s gone...he said he was going to the ministry or somewhere...”

“Then Avatar will strike tonight...” Hermione piped up but was silenced by one look from Athenia.

“We don’t know that Neville,” Athenia continued, as if it had been Neville who had spoken rather than Hermione, “I think we should watch Avatar and Quirrell...see what happens. If they aren’t at dinner then we’ll tell someone; let them deal with it...”

“But, will anyone take us seriously; I mean three first years...”

Athenia cut through quickly as she had seen Aleric walking in their direction. He hadn’t seen her yet and Athenia didn’t want to take any chances,

“Like I said, keep an eye on them...jumping to conclusions doesn't help matters. I'll speak to you later,” she added to Neville before hurrying away into the Great Hall, slipping down next to Daphne.

Neville watched her and gave Hermione a small pat on the shoulder to try and comfort her hurt expression at Athenia's treatment; then, being the loving friend he was, Neville walked with her towards the great hall for dinner.

“She's gotten better since last year,” he spoke in a low undertone to Hermione, “I mean, she's got a lot of pressure from her family and everything...”

“She doesn't even know me,” Hermione snapped at Neville who fell silent, “And yet she treats me like dirt. I heard that the muggleborn in her dormitory had to be taken to St Mungo's hours after she was admitted to the hospital wing...”

Neville shook his head, not wanting to get involved in girly bitchiness and gossip.

“I didn't think you were one to listen to gossips,” Neville observed.

Hermione blushed but held her ground,

“You have to admit Neville, that it's suspicious...”

Neville just shrugged and changed the subject; he wouldn't partake in Athenia's bad mouthing of Hermione, the same applied for Hermione's opinion of Athenia.

“I'll see you later Hermione,” he said as they reached their house tables. Neville took his place next to Hannah Abbott, a fellow first year as Hermione, huffing, sat down next to Terry Boot and pulled out of her bag a very large volume on Potions.

Dumbledore wasn't at dinner that night, but both Quirrell and Avatar were. Neville was certain that they would wait until after dinner before they tried anything; however Hannah's whispered gossip of Potters expulsion drove all thoughts from his mind...

“How...?” he spluttered as he tried to think up a reasonable explanation. Sure Potter and his gang were into pranks, but nothing serious.

“The word is the Rivers girl was involved; I mean everyone knows she was in the hospital wing with severe dark injuries...but the word is that she said it was Potter who did it...”

As ever, the Hogwarts gossip grapevine lived up to expectations.

Neville looked over to Athenia, sitting at the Slytherin table. She was whisperings something to her cousin and dorm mates....

Neville couldn't believe Athenia would do something like that so didn't reply to Hannah's comment as he helped himself to mixed veg.

Huffing in much the same way Hermione had, and making Neville wonder if huffing was a girl thing, Hannah turned to speak to Ernie; a dorm mate of Neville's and leaving Neville to his own thoughts which had turned back to Avatar and the stone.

The thoughts haunted him as he finished diner and made his way back to his common room, as he lay in his bed and he even dreamt about it. It was all very well Athenia saying they should observe, but what if that was just a way for Athenia to avoid any responsibility...shocked at his negative thoughts towards his friend he stopped and turned on his side, attempting his hardest to fall asleep.

In the next bed Ernie snored softly which slowly lulled Neville into a restless sleep.

He caught up with Athenia the next day and immediately asked about Avatar,

“He wasn't anywhere near it,” she replied confidently.

“But...”

“Lyra was in detention with him until midnight last night as she had been caught trying to hex a couple of Griffindors...Brown and Pavati I think it was...stupid giggling idiots...” she finished darkly.

“But...what about after?”

“I stayed outside his quarters until the early hours...no one left the door. He went in after Lyra came back from her detention and he didn’t come out. Dumbledore’s back now, so we can relax...”

The last was said with a fair amount of sarcasm which Neville ignored before pressing onto more pressing concerns,

“What this I hear about you and Potter?”

He thought he saw a fleeting look of guilt pass across his face; but as quickly as it had come it had gone, masked by her usual façade of indifference...

“Rumours. No one likes me at this school, so it stands to reason that they would link my name with his. Convenient that I’m a Slytherin, hmm?”

It was said so matter of fact that Neville was stunned into silence for a minute; however before he could say anything Athenia carried on with their previous conversation,

“We’ll keep an eye on Avatar and Quirrell though I think if they are going to do anything, they’ll probably do it when Dumbledore is least expecting it. Maybe towards the end of term as it’s at it’s most hectic then with the examiners coming in, tests for the younger years....”

Neville just stared at her, stunned. Why hadn’t he thought of that?

“Suppose...”

They had reached the greenhouses and with a small smile Athenia extracted herself from his company to go over to her dorm mates, listening intently at the latest gossip about the mudblood who was due to return back to school in a fortnight.

Neville shook his head and moved towards the Hufflepuffs, again pushing aside the feeling of unease that always came with Athenia and her views towards Muggleborns.

The term passed quickly...and suddenly the Easter holidays were upon them. During that time neither teacher had made a move despite the subtle stalking the three first years seemed to do. Potter had come back, and with him a new thirst for blood; Athenia's blood, to be specific; and every other day one of them was sent to the hospital wing with one thing or the other. It was when both of them came with unstoppable bloody noses, proof of an advanced spell gone wrong, that the matron flipped and told each to stay away from each other or risk no further treatment off her.

In response Athenia meekly asked Aleric to deal with Potter. After a raised eyebrow and some snide comments about her not being able to fight her own battles, Aleric gave in and Potter was later seen with a black eye and cut lip which he refused point blank to talk about.

Looking back on her request, Athenia supposed her favourite cousin status had played some part in not getting hexed into oblivion by Aleric. With his OWL's fast approaching, and the pressure to get all O's by his parents, Aleric's stress levels were so high that he would hex any unfortunate younger years if they so much as sneezed near him.

Each night and during the day Aleric could be seen, without fail, on one of the long mahogany desks revising religiously, his face a funny red colour as he tried to absorb as much information as he could. Additional to that, he had also started paying first years to be the subject of his practical spells. It was all very well to know the theory, he reasoned, but what was theory if you couldn't practice it on someone?

Athenia stayed in her dorm for the majority of the time, doing her homework on her bed, revising herself. She knew that her exams weren't majorly important but her uncle still expected her to get high grades.

In between all of this, her surveillance of the teachers, which was like watching grass grow, was amounting to nothing. They came and went about their daily schedules and Athenia felt she knew more about Avatar's daily routine than she did her own. However she defiantly knew they were up to something fishy, as she had caught both Potions Master and Defence teacher in deep discussion in secluded corners.

The Easter holiday's turned up, and Aleric opted to stay at Hogwarts, partly for the peace and quiet, and partly for the extensive library that it offered.

Taking a leaf out her cousins book Athenia wrote to her uncle saying she too would stay. It would give her a chance to avoid Romania this year and, as much as she wanted to see her brothers, Athenia thought that maybe her family would be more pleased if she worked to keep her grades up and therefore, through this, the family honour.

Writing to her uncle Flynn she said as much, though changing her wording to a much more diplomatic tone, she was rewarded when he wrote back saying that he was pleased with her attitude, and two days later sent her a heavy volume of the Dark Arts which Athenia quickly shoved in her bag before anyone could notice.

Damien himself was less than happy at her choice, writing that as the heir he commanded her to return with pocket loads of sweets or he would hex her...Athenia wrote back; pointing out that he was a year younger than her, didn't own a wand, knew no spells other than the basic theory that they had all been taught in the classroom, and that too many sweets rotted your teeth.

The next day she received a reply in the form of a face, which had been drawn on a scrap piece of parchment, and whose tongue was sticking out rudely at the reader.

Very mature Damien, Athenia thought as she threw the picture into the flames.

Neville also chose to stay as well as Hermione, much to Athenia's chagrin. Neville had pointed out that this would be a brilliant time to

get to know her. Athenia had snapped back that's she had no intention of getting to know her, and if Neville's termination of brilliant was when she would be alone with her elder cousin who could, and would, watch her every move despite his revision, Neville really needed to change his definition of the word.

Neville barley spoke to her in the week leading up to the holidays and it was with great pain that Athenia swallowed her pride and apologized, promising to keep an even closer eye on Avatar if they kept an eye on Quirrell.

Neville, like all Hufflepuffs, accepted the apology graciously.

To say the holidays dragged would be an understatement, as Aleric had gotten into the habit of getting her to test him as they were the only two Slytherins to stay behind, or so she thought.

Following Avatar had proved to be much harder as the corridors were mainly deserted, making it harder to stay hidden. But she was a Slytherin, and Slytherin's were noted for their cunningness, so Athenia picked up a book on charms and read up on tracking spells. Using what her uncle had taught her about mixing spells Athenia, after many tries, managed to create a spell that would alert her via a charmed sock which she carried around in her pocket, if he went near the third floor corridor.

Casting said spell on her head of house proved harder, though Athenia managed it by hiding behind a statue near his office. Once the door opened and Avatar stepped out Athenia whispered the incantation which was proved successfully by the brief purple glow that emitted from Avatar for about two seconds. To be on the safe side Athenia repeated the spell on Quirrell, just in case. Though Athenia somehow couldn't see her defense teacher acting without Avatar

Whoever said Hermione was brighter than Athenia clearly hadn't done their research. Ravenclaw the mudblood may be in, but all Ravenclaw was good for was reading and more reading. Mixing spells took careful calculation, something which Ravenclaws didn't have, being the anti social morons they were.

Almost skipping back to her common room Athenia was in such a good mood she actually enjoyed testing her tearing-his-hair-out-in-stress cousin.

She had also found more information on Heath, background information really, but as he had said they were to meet again Athenia wanted to know as much about him as she could so she would be ready. However, from what the book said Athenia deduced that she would have to become very skilled in the Dark Arts if she was ever to defeat him. Athenia stopped herself at the last though...where had that come from? Pushing away the thought and the uneasy feelings Athenia carried on with her business, pointedly ignoring it in the vain hopes that if she did the problem would go away.

Neville hung out, for the majority of the time, with Hermione until he realized that her revision was more important than having fun so in turn spent most of his time in the common room. As Aleric, as she had predicted, kept a close eye on her Athenia didn't see much of Neville.

The Easter holidays passed without event and it was the night before people would return, where Athenia felt she had done very well considering she was only a first year, that the sock in her pocket heated up while Athenia was returning back to the common room from the library, her arms filled with books.

Gasping Athenia dropped the books to the floor in the deserted corridor as she snatched the sock out of her pocket, staring at it in disbelief as warmth emitted from the sock through to her hand.

This couldn't be happening, she thought, but it was...the sock's heat turned up a notch and Athenia dropped it quickly as it nearly burnt her hand, staring in fear and stunned disbelief at the sock in front of her.

Why her? No, more importantly, Why now? Who could she go too?

Neville? No, he was down in the basements of the castle...plus she didn't know the password and it would take too long to get down there

and back up....Aleric? Athenia dismissed teh idea immediatly for a number of obvious reasons. Come on Athenia, she thought, think.

Her mind drew a blank until one person cropped up, a person she would usually die before asking help from. But in this case there was no choice...taking a deep breath and gingerly picking up the heated sock, carefully and quickly placing it in her pocket, Athenia hurried back towards the library to hopefully, get help.

What do you think? Tell me and I'll update tomorrow or the day after as I'm really getting into the story; I swear this one wrote itself.

Anyway, thanks again xx

Athenia bit her tongue to prevent herself swearing, as she walked up to her nemesis: Hermione Granger.

“Granger,” it was the civilest thing, and tone, she had ever used towards the girl, Athenia thought with some pleasure. Pleased at her new civil nature in regards to Hermione, Athenia carried on; blissfully unaware that in polite society calling someone by their surname is seen as anything but polite; unless of course you happened to be a teacher or an army commander: both of which Athenia was not.

In response Hermione raised an eyebrow,

“Rivers?”

Hermione’s tone was clipped and it was then that Athenia noticed the mudblood from her own dormitory sitting opposite Granger reading a charms book. Hadn’t she gone home? Athenia thought, but didn’t dwell on it as there were more pressing concerns to consider.

“I want you to come with me. I want a word in private.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the order,

“You want? Rivers hasn’t anyone told you that wants never gets. And besides, after what happened to Kate I hardly think I would want to go anywhere private with you.”

Athenia felt herself flush in embarrassment and humiliation as Kate sniggered from behind her book, not bothering to keep the noise hushed. She really didn’t want to say anything in front of the stupid mudblood...but then if Granger really wasn’t going to move...

“It’s...It’s about the you know what...” Athenia tried to give Hermione a meaningful look which somehow seemed to come across as the evil eye, so she stopped.

Hermione just stared at Athenia blankly, inspiring impatience inside of the Slytherin.

“The You Know What, behind the woof woof?”

Trying to code words was not her speciality, Athenia decided as soon as the words left her mouth.

“The woof woof? Really Rivers, and you purebloods call yourself sophisticated? I beg to differ,” Kate drawled from behind her book.

Athenia ignored her and tried again,

“The thing...guarded by the bigger thing...”

Hermione was still looking blank. For a Ravenclaw she certainly wasn't acting bright.

“Guarded?” this was Kate, her curiosity tweaked now as she realised this wasn't just a stupid pureblood insanity bout.

But Hermione had finally caught on.

“Right...yes...I'll meet you there; I need to get my books...”

Hermione gestured to the desk which was covered in book.

“No time,” Athenia grabbed Hermione's arm and ran out of the library, Kate close on their heels...

“What is going on...?”

“Get lost mudblood...”Athenia snarled, regretting it when Hermione yanked her arm out of Athenia's grasp.

“I think you should apologize to Kate now.” Kate? That was her name? Athenia was suddenly struck that in the whole time she had been at Hogwarts, she hadn't known the girl's name. Pushing it aside, Athenia went on the defensive.

“If you want Avatar to get to the stone...”

“How do you know...?”

“Avatar? The head of our house?”

The two other girls spoke simultaneously. Athenia growled with frustration as the sock glowed hotter and hotter in her pocket, indicating Avatar was getting closer and closer.

“Just come on Granger...we don’t have much time...”

Hermione took a deep breath, finally picking up the urgency in her tone and hurried after Athenia.

Growling in her throat Kate followed them. It would seem a strange sight, Athenia thought as they reached the third floor corridor, two Slytherins and a Ravenclaw, two of which were mudbloods...

She was in such a rush as she raced up the final set of stairs that she banged straight into...

“Neville?”

“Quirrell’s gone through...I was coming to get help.”

“Quirrell?”

Athenia was taken aback.

“Yeah, I was following him as he seemed a bit...funny. He came up here and just went through. I waited outside to see if he would come out, but he hasn’t so I was just coming to get help...”

“No time,” Athenia proclaimed and, wondering if she were mad, hurried through the door with Neville, Hermione and Kate close behind her.

Opening the door Athenia gasped at what lay before her; and she wasn’t the only one. There, lying sprawled across the floor of the small room, was a large three headed dog, fast asleep.

“Fluffy...” Hermione breathed its name, nearly causing an insane eruption of laughter to erupt from Athenia’s throat. Who in the world would call a monstrosity like that Fluffy?

Fighting it back Athenia silently pointed to a charmed harp which was letting out a sweet melody before pointing to the ground where a trap door could just be seen under the dog’s massive paws.

Stepping cautiously forward Neville helped her lift a huge paw off the trap door and opened it, motioning for the other two to jump down. Hermione jumped down instantly, Athenia pushed Kate when it looked like she was about to back out.

“After you...” she whispered nastily as Kate was embraced by the darkness, before jumping in the darkness herself. Neville came down after her.

Athenia landed with a thump on top of something soft....something that went ‘oof!’ as she scrambled up,

“Glad to know your good for something,” Athenia snipped at Kate who glared back at her through the darkness.

Hermione stood up in what looked to be a long dark corridor with a door at the other end, breathing heavily and helped up Kate; just as Neville made an appearance, landing with a loud thud.

“Oh Neville, I am so sorry,” Hermione shut up as Kate cut through,

“It’s so cold.” And indeed it was. The temperature had dropped below zero and Slithering noises came from around them in the darkness. Athenia let out a squeal as she felt something wrap itself round her foot.

“What the...”

She shook it off just as another vine wrapped itself tightly round her middle.

Neville’s voice rang out throughout the darkness,

"It's devils' snare. No one move or it'll squeeze us to death..."

"Don't move," Athenia heard Kate hiss somewhere on her left, "Easy for you to say...how are we going to get through all this....this plant to get to the door if we can't move..."

"We need sunlight...or fire..."

"I'll just light an imaginary match, shall I?" Kate's scathing voice again.

"Will you just shut up...you're not helping..." Athenia snapped

"No...no I know a spell..." this was Hermione from somewhere behind Athenia,

"Well what is it?" Athenia hissed as she struggled with the thick vines which were now wrapping round her neck threateningly.

"It's erm...ah what was it? Er..."

"In your own time," Athenia snapped sarcastically

Hermione shot Athenia an annoyed look which was lost on it's receiver in the dark.

"Will you hurry up, the thing is strangling me," Kate gasped while struggling with the long tendrils that now wrapped her whole body.

"Flamorate!" A bright light lit up the whole cold damp corridor as a load of flames shot out from the end of Hermione's wand, making the plants cower back; instantly letting go of their human prey.

"Run!" This was Neville and Athenia lost no time in obeying, fear giving her speed as she and Kate reached the far door at the same time, falling through the doorway together as Neville and Hermione brought up the rear, slamming the door.

The room they were in was small and circular with two thick wooden doors opposite each other. The room smelt musty and damp. If it

were possible, it was even colder in the small anti chamber and Athenia slowly began to feel hopeless...like she was never going to be happy again...

“Right...what’s next,” this was Hermione though like Athenia her voice had a kind of defeated quality to it.

Opening the door Athenia managed to catch a small glimpse of five tall cloaked figures before a woman’s voice sounded, loud and clear, in her mind;

“You mudbloods will never take me alive...”

A loud mocking laugh and...

“Avada Kedavra...”

A flash of green light, of a body falling gracefully.

Athenia was falling too, into blackness as the terror took hold.

How long she was out she didn’t know, only that she woke up to Neville’s voice and a patting of the cheeks.

She was still in the anti chamber, though the door was closed.

“Who screamed...who spoke?”

It hadn’t been her, and she knew Neville wasn’t in the habit of using the mudblood word; it couldn’t have been the other two as they were mudbloods themselves...

“No one spoke...” Neville broke through gently, kneeling on the floor next to her, “Or screamed. You just fell as soon as Hermione opened the door five minutes ago.”

Athenia felt cold and clammy and was even more surprised to feel tears pricking her eyes.

"I...I fell?" she asked, hating the stutter in her voice, and hating even more that Kate was here to witness this momentary act of weakness; though saying that, Kate was sitting on the floor herself, her face pale as she shook slightly.

"Yeah...I felt...felt as if I would....happiness just drained out of me, hope too...I remembered when my Granny died when I was young...." Hermione stuttered, herself pale.

"Look," Neville stood up, "We need to go on...whatever is out there we know that they take happiness away so we need a spell to protect us from that?"

Silence fell as each tried to think before Kate jumped up and snapped her fingers,

"A Cheering Charm."

"Good idea," Hermione cut through, "I can't imagine why I didn't think of that....especially as I can do them..."

"You can do those? I didn't think they were taught until second year?" Neville asked, awed.

Hermione went pink but just mumbled something about reading up on spells.

"Well it's worth a try, right?" Neville asked, looking at Athenia for conformation. Athenia didn't think that a simple cheering charm would work on something of that power...but then she didn't have any better ideas so...

"Go on then," she sighed as she picked herself up from the ground, the woman's voice still haunting her thoughts.

Hermione pointed the wand at Neville first and cast the spell before turning to Kate and Athenia as Neville stood there with an insane cheerful grin on his face.

"You will be able to take these off, won't you?" Athenia asked, as a horrible thought occurred to her.

"Of course I will now stop fidgeting and come here." Athenia thought about snapping at Hermione to remember who she was speaking to, but refrained. An insane feeling of cheery cheerfulness filled her and she smiled broadly,

"Now, you see a smile makes you look a lot prettier," Kate sniped. Athenia turned round, the smile at complete odds with her next words,

"When I get through this remind me to hex you mudblood..."

"I told you, the term mudblood loses its desired effect after you're called it ten times a day. Not shut up with your pathetic threats. Quirrell will already be ahead..." Kate turned to Hermione, "Cheer me up."

Hermione muttered the spell and one more person's face was lit up insanely.

Hermione cast the spell on herself before holding the door handle,

"Ready?" she asked cheerfully and Athenia suddenly had a mad desire to laugh and dance on the spot.

"Ready." Neville spoke and the door was flung open as the cloaked creatures came towards them...

The cold hit them like an icy storm wind, not unlike the one she had howled round her room in Romania...but the cheering charm held as the four first years walked through the dank and dreary room slowly as not to antagonise the cloaked figures.

The cloaked figures hovered closer but stopped, confused as their prey refused to be upset and without hope.

"Run..." Hermione said through her smile as she felt the effects slowly wear off.

The four ran to the door and Hermione yanked it open, everyone piling in just as the cloaked hooded things flew quickly, suddenly, towards them, their blackened scabby hands reaching out to grab their prey.

The charm broke the minute the door closed, as the presence of the dementors overcame the charm.

"What's wrong with her?" Athenia asked as she prodded Hermione's unmoving body with her toe.

"Don't do that," Neville admonished as he crouched down to look at her. "Maybe...maybe those things had an effect on her..." he tapped her cheeks, "She's not waking up?"

"Leave her, she'll just hold us back..." Athenia stated ruthlessly.

"Would you say that if it had been you in her place?" Kate snapped, successfully making Athenia to fall silent.

"She's not dead, just knocked out...must have banged her head on the door frame as we all pushed through...look, there's a bruise..."

"Well that's all very well but honestly, what about that?" Athenia pointed towards what none of them had spotted. The new room they were in was merely made up of two small platforms with a large fiery cavern below. The heat was in direct contrast to the coldness of just before and the smell of sulphur rose up from the fiery depths and assaulted her nostrils; there was one bridge connecting the small rocky platform they were on to the one at the other opposite about three hundred feet away where, Athenia thought, another door was.

"Right...so I guess it's this bridge..." she stepped cautiously onto the stone bridge which didn't think it could hold her weight let alone the other three.

"What about Hermione?" Neville asked, desperate.

Athenia looked over before stepping off the bridge and going over.

“If we leave her here...then when we come back we can take her with us. It'll be much more safe to carry on rather than all three of us carrying her over...”

Hermione mumbled something, her eyelids fluttering open before shutting as she fell back into her concussion.

Neville gave each girl a despairing look before realising that to carry Hermione across the perilous bridge would indeed be foolhardy, so settled for taking off his cloak and lay it under Hermione's head.

Following the two girls, they approached the bridge.

“I'll go first,” Neville decided, “Then once I'm over one of you follow. One at a time seems best...”

“It can't be that easy,” Athenia muttered as Kate started placing her foot on the various coloured grey stones that made up the pathway.

“Stick to the pale stones,” Kate spoke, as she tried her foot on one pale stone before trying a dark grey one. The dark one fell through the bridge and fell into the sulphur lake. The three first years watched as it got eaten up by the acidic lake.

Taking a deep breath Neville walked across the bridge slowly, making sure to step on only the pale coloured stones and always touching the stones in front of him before moving on, so that the girls could follow his own path across.

Halfway over he glanced back and gave both girls a small smile. As he turned round he stepped on a dark grey stone which fell from its place right beneath him, taking the whole of Neville with it.

Athenia and Kate both gave an involuntary yell as Neville grabbed onto one of the paler stones with his finger tips, holding on for dear life as the sulphur lake below him bubbled threateningly.

Alright, so I changed a few things. But personally, as a writer I like to inject my own ideas into a story as it makes it more original and the readers have no idea on what to expect. Mwahahaha.

Anyway, hope you enjoyed it. Reviews welcomed. Thanks x

Athenia screamed as Neville fell through the bridge and, seized again by moment insanity not unlike the one in the forest, ran across the bridge; disregarding completely her own safety as she jumped from pale stone to pale stone, until she reached Neville who was clinging on for dear life.

Grabbing one hand she tried to pull him up, the heat from below making her sweat profusely.

“Come on Neville...” she muttered as she pulled his collar and wrist. However it wasn’t doing any good and her hands were slipping until...

“Nooooo.....” Neville fell back, his eyes wide with terror and his mouth open in a silent scream as he plunged to his death. However half way down he stopped mid-air, much to Athenia’s confusion, and started floating back up....

“What?”

Looking up she realised why Neville was disobeying the laws of gravity: Kate was levitating him back up through the hole and down next to her.

Neville sat on a large pale stone shivering and shaking from fright and shock. He recovered enough to somehow call over to Kate,

“Thank you...”

Kate merely nodded and started making shooing motions with her hands which confused Athenia, until she realised the mudblood was shooing them across the bridge....

“Come on Neville...”

Dragging him up and placing her shoulder under his elbow she directed him over the last half of the bridge, making doubly sure to only step on the pale stones.

After they crossed Kate, with one last look at Hermione, a girl whom she had come to respect for her work ethic and intelligence, as well

as study partner, she trod daintily over the bridge; being extra careful to steer clear of the dark stones.

Reaching the other side she gave a small strained smile at Neville, a boy who she just couldn't work out. He was a Hufflepuff, therefore making him weak; and yet he had shown tremendous courage in coming down here...but he was friends with Rivers...it just didn't make any sense, she mused as the three of them walked through the door and...

"It's a chess board," Athenia gasped as lights came up illuminating a giant chess board with the pieces in their respective places.

"What..."

"It's obvious, isn't it?" Kate remarked to Neville's baffled exclamation,

"We have to play our way across...see, that side has lost a pawn..."

And indeed the White side had, Athenia noted...

"But I can't play chess," Neville was sweating again from nerves,

"Me neither...so I suppose we should go back," Kate said snidely, her barb intended for Athenia, "Maybe get a fully grown witch or wizard to get involved..."

"We got this far...and as for playing chess, I've won quite a few games in the common room," Athenia cut through as she surveyed the black side and the pieces which were missing. They were down 3 pawns, a castle and a bishop...that would be a hard blow to their side but Athenia was confident they would pull it off. Quirrell evidently wasn't a good chess player.

"Neville," she addressed her friend, "You stand there where the pawn would be. Mud...Kate, you go where the bishop is...I'll be the knight," she decided as they all took their places, nervously. Athenia climbing on top of a horse piece

“But if this is wizards chess...then don't the pieces get battered?”
Neville asked from the front...

Athenia licked her lips from her place near the Queen, but only replied,

“White always goes first. Let the games begin.”

What followed was the most intense game of chess Athenia had ever played. This wasn't just some game to be played in the common room, they were playing for their lives....

The game won't end until the King is taken, Athenia thought as the White Queen moved forward and promptly destroyed her bishop just like Athenia wanted her to do, and there is only one way...

“Athenia, no...” this was Neville who had seen where her tactics were going.

“Yes,” Athenia snarled, “It's the only way...I'll sacrifice myself so Kate can checkmate the King. You stay where you are Neville and we've won...”

“But...but you'll get hurt...”

“Doesn't matter; that's chess. You sacrifice some to win the overall game...” then, without waiting for Neville's response she said, “Knight to F8.”

The Knight, with Athenia on its back, moved forward with Neville and Kate watching incredulously.

Athenia suddenly remembered her game with Daphne on the train after she had told Pansy off...how trivial it seemed....

“Check,” she spoke loudly and clearly as she held on to the piece for dear life.

“Athenia...”

“What do you think you’re doing, you stupid pureblood...”

Athenia didn’t answer, merely kept her eyes on the bishop as it left its place near the King and headed towards her; taking its large sceptre it raised it high and brought it crashing down into the knight.

Athenia gave a short scream as she fell off, onto the side of the board where she lay motionless, her hair covered in plaster as the large figure of the once magnificent Knight rained down on her in the form of little pieces of rubble.

“ATHENIA!” Neville screamed through the fading Crash.

“Stop! We’re still playing.” Kate turned from Neville and stared at the King within her line of fire.

Taking five steps diagonal Kate took a deep breath and yelled,

“Checkmate.”

The King bowed its head and, taking off its crown, threw it at her feet.

Neville had already run to Athenia’s side as Kate came up.

“She needs medical attention, so does Hermione back there....” He looked at Kate who just stared back with narrowed eyes. “Take Athenia and Hermione up to the hospital wing...I’ll carry on; when you get to the school get Dumbledore or McGonagall...they need to know.”

Kate just stared at Neville, unblinking for a few beats before giving an almost invisible nod.

Levitating Athenia, Kate stopped for a moment and stared at Neville in an assessing way.

“What....?” Neville asked nervously...

“Rivers is a Slytherin, a blood purist who got her cousin to hex me so badly I was admitted to hospital; she doesn’t think twice about calling

me a mudblood and will go out of way deliberately to make my life, and the other muggleborns in the school, a misery. As for you, you're the opposite in every way; valuing people for who they are rather than their blood. Why do you care so much about her?"

Neville stared at her; there was no malice behind her voice, merely matter of fact and more than a large dose of curiosity.

"I dunno...I just know, deep down, that she isn't like that...if she's given the right environment she could change. Not all Slytherins are evil."

Kate scoffed but shut up when Neville pointed out,

"You're not."

Stupid Hufflepuff, Kate thought.

"Right," she snapped, to cover up her own embarrassment, "I'll take Rivers and Hermione back," she paused, "And Neville....good luck."

Neville and Kate stared at each other before Neville, seemingly having silently made up his mind about something: smiled, nodded his thanks, and turned round and walked across the board.

The White King moved to the side and a large stone archway materialised in the stone wall behind him, leading into darkness.

One last smile and Kate watched him disappear into the darkness.

Sighing she turned to the floating unconscious form of her dorm mate,

"Come on then; I can't see you as Neville sees you but for his sake I'll do what he asks."

Neville felt his way along the dark corridor before he found another archway which had light shining from beyond. Stumbling through, he stopped at the sight of Quirrell standing in front of a large mirror, muttering quietly.

He stopped when Neville descended the last of the stone steps and turned around, his face set into a hard and cruel expression,

“Avatar?” For despite seeing Quirrell running in here alone he had thought the Avatar would have gotten here before; that Quirrell was going to meet him.

“Roberto? Here? Is that the best you could come up with Longbottom? But then Roberto is the type...yes I can see where you are coming from. Strong, arrogant, overbearing, likes the sound of his own voice...yes, now I can see where you are coming from...”

“But Athenia...she heard you and Avatar...after Halloween...”

“Was that her? Yes, I thought I heard someone nearby. But no, dear boy,” the last words were full of sarcasm, “Avatar is nothing more than a petty thief with no money to his name...family went bankrupt decades ago. Roberto saw the arrival of the stone a chance to make a fortune for himself....yet he failed to see the bigger picture; the power the stone held; the possibilities that it opened up,” Quirrell’s eyes were glowing with an insane happiness as he gazed on Neville; as if willing the boy to understand.

But it wasn’t his defence teacher’s apparent insanity that unnerved Neville the most; it was the lack of his stutter coupled with the new found strength in Quirrell’s, Quirrell of all people, voice mixed with his insane blabbering.

“But...but I don’t...”

“Understand? No, a stupid boy like yourself couldn’t, could you? But you see I had a bigger destiny; a destiny to serve my master...”

Neville’s scar suddenly burned painfully, making his eyes water though he resisted the urge to shout out.

Quirrell clicked his fingers and suddenly vines appeared midair, wrapping themselves tightly around Neville...

“Now, back to work; my master needs the stone; unicorn blood only works for so long...how to get the stone...”

“That was you in the forest?” Neville blurted out without thinking.

“Yes boy, it was. Unicorn blood gives immortality but at a price...my master needs the stone...only then may he be free...but how to get it; I see myself offering the stone to my master...” Quirrell started feeling around the mirror, as if there were some hidden latch that would open up a secret compartment which would reveal the stone.

Neville started struggling with the ropes to get free; however the ropes tightened considerably, making his gasp. Quirrell ignored him and carried on looking

At the lack of success at finding anything, Quirrell gave a scream of frustration and yelled,

“Master, help me...”

Then to Neville’s absolute horror a voice answered,

“The boy, use the boy...”

Quirrell turned round, his face screwed up in hatred.

“Come here Longbottom.” Another click of his fingers and the ropes vanished.

Deciding any hopes of running would be futile Neville stumbled clumsily forward towards the mirror; though he was determined to ensure that Quirrell didn’t get the stone at any cost.

“Tell me boy, what do you see?”

Neville looked into the mirror, hard. His scar was prickling unpleasantly but he ignored it as he stared at his reflection.

Then, incredibly, he saw his reflection hold the stone and smile at him, placing it in his pocket. Neville felt something heavy drop in his pocket and suddenly knew without a doubt he had the stone...

"Well?" Quirrell's voice was sharp with impatience.

"I see myself....myself married with children; a big family. My eldest child is Quidditch captain..." he garbled, saying the first thing that came into his mind.

Then the voice came back,

"He lies."

"Tell the truth Longbottom," Quirrell snarled. Neville took a step back in the face of his fury,

"I...I did see tha...that sir, honestly...."

"Let me speak to him."

"Master you are not strong enough," Quirrell responded

"I said, let me speak to him."

The voice this time was harsher, sharper. Like nails grating down a blackboard.

Quirrell began to un-wrap his turban and in the mirror...Neville nearly fainted with horror as a face began to emerge. A face...a face stuck to the back of Quirrell's head...a hideous face, the thing of nightmares: two snake like red eyes and two slits for a nose. A thin mouth....

Neville let out a small squeak, the only noise he could make as he concentrated on not messing himself.

"Neville Longbottom...see what I have become; see what I have become because of you. Once, Lord Voldemort was invincible and now...look at me. LOOK AT ME!"

Neville couldn't help but look, his face glued to the floor with fear as his scar burned painfully.

"You are a brave boy," the snake voice continued, "Just like your parents...they could have joined me; but your father decided to die...he tried to fight me but I killed him. No-one stands in Lord Voldemort's way...your mother, she needn't have died. She could have lived if she had let me have you...my one threat...the one who brought me to this state, weakened and living off Unicorn blood..."

"Shut up!" Neville half yelled, half blinded by tears at Voldemort's taunts towards his mother.

"Yes...very brave. You would make a good death eater; loyal, brave...join me...join me by giving me the stone in your pocket!"

"NEVER!"Neville yelled, anger hiding his fear

"Foolish boy. Grab him; grab the stone..."

Then, like any normal person, Neville ran.

He had never known anything about his parents death, other than that Voldemort had killed them. His anger, guilt and misery at what he had just learnt added speed but Quirrell was right behind him, tackling to the ground and grabbing his throat.

Then, just as quickly, pulled away: his hands looking like they had been dunked in acid.

"Master...it hurts..."

"The kill him, fool; and be done with it."

Quirrell raised his wand, ready to kill. In that moment Neville knew that he had to do something; he also knew Quirrell couldn't touch him without suffering.

Pushing himself up he tackled Quirrell with a strength he never knew he had, pushing his hands on Quirrell's face as smoke came between his fingers, mixed in with Quirrell's screams...

"Master...master, help me..."

And Neville was screaming too...screaming at the pain in his scar, at the pain of losing his parents, at the pain of holding on....but he must, he mustn't let Voldemort get the stone.

The last thing he saw before he blacked out was a swish of bright purple and orange robes; then everything went black.

Thanks guys, please review.

Something glittered gold above him...what was it? Neville tried to sit up but his whole body felt so heavy he couldn't do more than stay where he was, his eyes half open.

As his vision swam into focus he realised that the glittering gold was in fact half moon spectacles, on the smiling face of the headmaster.

"Good afternoon Neville..."

Suddenly, in massive rush, everything came flying back to Neville.

"Professor...Quirrell, the stone...he was going to use it to bring back V...V..."

"Hush dear boy, you have slept so long I fear you may be a bit behind the times; the stone is gone as is, regrettably, Professor Quirrell," upon seeing Neville's confused bordering on baffled look, Dumbledore elaborated, "By the time I arrived Voldemort had fled, leaving behind a very dead Quinius Quirrell

"But...but sir he tried to kill me..."

Dumbledore closed his eyes and a pain filled expression crossed his face,

"I know; I feared that when I arrived that the effort of keeping Quirrell off you had indeed killed you..."

"But...but sir...where is the stone? And why couldn't he touch me? I don't understand...I got the stone but how...?"

"Neville, please relax or Madam Pomfrey will have me thrown out."

Neville swallowed and for the first time since waking up took in his surroundings as Dumbledore continued,

"Miss Rivers, Miss Granger and Miss Brown will be pleased that you have woken up; I believe that Miss Rivers especially has come along every day to see how you are faring..." Neville's eyes fell on his

bedside table where what looked like half of Honeydukes had been delivered to him.

“Tokens I believe, from your admirers. Mister Lestrangle took it upon himself, after he found out how you saved his cousin, to send you a letter...here it is, a rare thing for Rodolphus’s son to do indeed...” Dumbledore pulled from the pile an envelope with his name written across it in elegant script. The Lestrangle coat of arms was printed in the corner.

Neville took the envelope, looked at it and placed it to the side; he had too many questions to ask. The letter, as much as it intrigued him, could wait.

“How does Athenia’s cousin know I saved her....well, I didn’t, not really. All I did was tell Kate to take her and Hermione back to the hospital wing...”

“But would Miss Brown have taken Miss Rivers if you had not insisted upon it?”

Neville shook his head sadly.

“So you did in effect save her life, for she was in a bad state when she was brought to the infirmary though nothing Madam Pomfrey could not fix. As for how he knew...well, what happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret; so, naturally, the whole school knows. The Hogwarts grape vine never ceases to amaze me.”

“How long have I been here sir?” Neville asked, not sure he actually wanted to know the answers.

“Five days. Your exams start next week; I believe Miss Granger was very worried you would not wake up in time to take them, she will indeed be very relieved to find you have.”

Exams...he hadn’t revised...funny, Neville thought, how he was worrying over something as trivial as exams when he had come so close to death.

Forcing himself back to the matter at hand he persisted,

“B...but sir, the stone...”

Dumbledore sighed,

“I see you need answers, and am not to be distracted; very well, as I have said the stone is gone. Professor Quirrell did not manage to take it from you; I arrived in time to prevent that...”

“So Kate managed to tell you?”

“Indeed. I was going down to the kitchens to get my nightly hot chocolate when I was met by a queer sight; Miss Brown levitating two unconscious students along the corridor. My curiosity aroused I enquired as to what had happened; Miss Brown told me everything and immediately I came down, managing to pull Quirrell off you before any further damage to you could be done...”

“But Quirrell...you said...”

“He is dead Neville, regrettably as he was once a good wizard before he was bought in by Voldemort’s lies...”

“But...he couldn’t touch me...why sir?”

“If there is one thing Voldemort does not understand, it is love...your mother died for you and a love so powerful, so deep as that, casts protection even after the ones we love are gone; it is in your very skin. Quirrell, in his new found greed and power, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason...It was agony for him to touch something so pure, so selfless and good.”

Another thought suddenly occurred to Neville,

“Sir...V, sorry, He Who Must...”

“Call him Voldemort Neville; fear of a name increases the fear of the thing itself.”

"Voldemort...he said I was the one threat to him...why though? Is that why he t...tried to kill me as a baby? But...how...I was only a baby...?"

"Alas, Neville, I cannot answer that. One day, you will know...when you are older. I know you do not want to hear this but it is for the best."

Neville fought down a wave of disappointment but accepted Dumbledore's words, seeing no point in arguing.

"There is something else..."

"Fire away."

"Quirrell said Professor Avatar...he said he was a petty thief..."

"Professor Avatar handed in his resignation as soon as I brought you back from the dungeons. Remember Neville, bankruptcy and desperation can drive a man to do strange and insane things."

"But...Athenia said he was a member of pureblood society..."

"Indeed. Professor Avatar's pride is all he has left since his family went bankrupt two decades ago. When people are in his position, they cling onto what little they have; and in Professor Avatar's case he clung onto his pride and blood. However, in the end, it added up to nothing..."

"Will he go to prison sir..."

"Alas, no; he was not in the dungeon with Quirrell, so we have no evidence other than Miss Rivers testimony of what she heard to go on; I also believe that Miss Rivers herself is reluctant to get involved in the affair?"

Neville nodded before another thought occurred to him,

"May I ask just one more question, sir?"

“Just one?”

“When we were down in the dungeons and I told Kate to take Athenia back...she asked why I was friends with a blood purist when we have such different views. How I could tolerate such intolerance...”

“This disturbs you?” Dumbledore inquired gently. Neville merely nodded and Dumbledore sighed,

“I have known the Lestrangle’s for years. I went to school myself with Miss Rivers great grandfather, and know how strong they hold to their beliefs. Hatred, dear boy, is a funny thing, as funny as the concept of love in many ways.

“It is born from fear which stems from insecurity and ignorance, things which the Lestranges and others live on if they but knew it,” he paused to allow Neville to absorb the facts,

“Ignorance?” Neville enquired, for he had never viewed Athenia as that and was wondering where this conversation was going. “But Athenia...”

“Miss Rivers was brought up in that environment where blood purity is preached; she knows nothing else. It is up to you to teach her, and so far I would say you have done a commendable job.”

Neville was baffled and it showed,

“Who was the first person Miss Rivers went looking for when she realised the stone was under threat? Miss Granger,” Dumbledore answered his own question, “She allowed Miss Granger to cast a cheering charm on her despite her initial mistrust; and she sacrificed herself so you and Miss Brown, a muggleborn, could carry on. Actions speak louder than word Neville; especially in this case.”

“But...her family...”

“Will always hold her back until she herself can find the courage to overcome the hurdle and make the right decisions within herself. Until then all you can do is encourage and support her.”

“So...there is hope?” Neville asked, feeling slightly brighter.

“There is hope for all who seek it. However, humans have the unnatural knack of seeking and choosing things which proves to be worst for them. Take Voldemort for example; power and immortality are the things he prizes above all, things which in comparison to kindness, love and compassion, friendship are meaningless.”

Neville tried to take all this in, but gave up because it hurt his head to think so hard.

“But sir...will Athenia and Kate ever get along?”

“No one can predict the future Neville; not even me. However, as I said, the right encouragement, love and environment will do wonders for people in dire situations.”

Neville gave up and lay back into the pillows; tired beyond words.

“Now, enough questions. I suggest you make a start on the sweets; Bertie Botts Beans seems a good place to start. Unfortunately in my youth I lost my liking for them when I came across a vomit flavoured one...maybe a nice toffee, do you think?” he asked, holding up a brown coloured one and popping it into his mouth before pulling a face,

“Alas, ear wax.”

Neville couldn't help but smile.

The rest of the night passed slowly, but with so much to think about Neville found it impossible to sleep. So, turning on his bedside table at three in the morning, he decided to read Aleric's letter.

Opening the envelope he pulled out two sheets of customised parchment, which held the Lestrangle coat of arms at the top, and which underneath held neat elegant script.

Neville,

I am writing to offer my thanks on behalf of my whole family for saving my cousin in the incidents that took place on the last day of the Easter holidays.

I have talked to my cousin and she has revealed everything that happened, right down to how you tried to talk her out of such a ridiculous move which could have gotten her killed.

In response to this, and from my father's own request, I wish to offer you the family's deep thanks and to tell you we are indebted to you for your actions in regards to Athenia.

If there is ever anything you, or your family, need, do not hesitate to ask.

Many regards and wishing you a speedy recovery,

Aleric Rodolphus Lestrangle.

Neville re-read the letter with faint amusement, but it was a generous offer as well as an unexpected one. Neville doubted he would ever take Aleric's offer up, but as Dumbledore's words echoed round his head, he realised that it placed him in a good position to help Athenia.

Placing the letter back in the envelope, Neville put it on his bedside cabinet before lying down; his eyes suddenly heavy as he slowly fell asleep.

Kate and Hermione visited him later that day, though Athenia was missing from their mists. Neville told them everything, as he felt they had a right to know, and was happy by the responses he got.

"But...that means he's not gone, right? He's still out there?" Kate put forward and was surprised to see Neville shrug,

“Gran has a saying; there is no point worrying about something, especially if you don’t know what it is and when it will come.”

“What about revision Neville; you have to work hard as I heard Professor Dumbledore say that you’ll be out for your exams on Monday...”

Neville couldn’t help but laugh at her concerns, to which he was rewarded with a nasty scowl,

“It’s all very well to laugh Neville; but you won’t be laughing when you fail...”

“True. But I can only do my best, can’t I?”

Both Hermione and Kate nodded at the sense in this, Hermione grudgingly, and the rest of the visit was passed with a few games of exploding snap and laughter before Madam Pomfrey shooed them out, insisting that Neville needed rest.

Athenia herself came later that night after dinner, her books tucked tightly under her arm.

“How are you?” she asked once she had seated herself on the hard orange chair.

“Better...the sweets help,” he added as a joke and was pleased to see Athenia smile slightly. She looked tired and wan and he wondered if she had gotten grief for her interaction with Kate and Hermione.

Dumbledore’s words came back to him and he suddenly felt very sorry for Athenia, as well as feeling admiration for what she had done down in the dungeons.

“So...what happened after I got knocked out?”

So for the second time that day Neville told her everything, and on the spur of the moment told her a heavily edited version of his conversation with Dumbledore; as well as her cousin's letter.

"Yeah, Aleric was pleased that I wasn't dead though it didn't stop him from telling me how stupid I was in the first place; I think he's written to uncle Rodolphus about it though I haven't heard anything."

Neville showed her the letter and its contents, and watched with amusement as Athenia's eyebrows gradually travelled higher and higher up her forehead.

"I suppose this is a good thing; I mean, I was meaning to ask you anyway...you know, over the holidays when I get back from Romania...if your not doing anything then maybe, you know..." she stumbled over the words,

"Come over?" he prompted and was rewarded by a slight smile,

"Yeah; I mean I would have to ask my uncles first but I'm sure they would be fine with it. Damien starts Hogwarts next year so he'll be even more egotistical than usual and I think I'll need some restraint when dealing with him," she joked.

"That's fine. I'll ask Gran and we can arrange something?"

Athenia nodded before moving on to more important matters,

"Has Dumbledore told you we are all going to get special awards for services to the school...hopefully he'll give us extra points so Gryffindor don't win the house cup."

Neville smiled at the scowl on her face.

"I'm happy just with the award. I mean, Gran will be pleased as I'll be living up to my dad."

Athenia nodded vaguely, her mind on other things; she seemed to be struggling with herself before she blurted out,

“How much revision have you done?”

Neville gave a small groan,

“Don’t you start: Hermione has already been on at me for it...?”

Athenia’s face screwed up in disgust at the connection but to Neville’s relief she didn’t say anything.

“Anyway,” Athenia continued as she spied Madam Pomfry coming out of her office, a determined look on her face as she made her way towards the two first years, “better go; you need your rest.”

As it was the next few days flew by and as predicted Neville was out in time for his exams. The exam themselves weren’t as bad as he had predicted though he rarely saw either Hermione or Athenia as both had taken to busy themselves with so much revision it was as if they themselves were studying for their OWL’s.

Kate told him, in a very sarcastic way, that she thought Athenia was in fact trying to outdo Hermione grade wise. Her tone spoke volumes about the likelihood of that ever happening.

However with both Hermione and Athenia absent he had taken to studying with Kate who proved to be a mystery herself. She was a Slytherin muggleborn who had extensive knowledge on the wizarding world and spells in general, especially considering how long she had actually been in the wizarding world.

“I read,” was her answer to his queries.

No wonder she gets on with Hermione so well, Neville thought in an amused way.

The exams passed in a flurry of activity and, leaving the classroom after taking his final Defence test, Neville, who had never been good at schoolwork in general, felt as if a giant burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

Athenia on the other hand took a different view and started to fret over all her answers, convincing herself she had it all wrong; developing an annoying habit of interrogating him on his own answers and comparing them to her own.

The end of term feast came up fast and it was with a smile that Neville sat down next to Hannah Abbot, listening to the general chatter around him...he could see Athenia at the Slytherin table, smiling at something her cousin and Greengrass said. Kate sat on her own further down the table, looking as if she neither wanted nor cared about the large gaping spaces either side of her; though Neville knew that to be untrue.

He had caught a glimpse of the real her, the hurt her, down in the dungeons when she had asked about Athenia. The rejection from her house hurt her and he hoped that what Dumbledore would announce would help her to be more accepted by her house.

Hermione was sitting at the Ravenclaw table, in a deep discussion with Terry Boot about something; she was pointing to a open page in a book and making wild gestures with her hands which was mimicked, equally, by Terry the rare moment Hermione paused to draw breath.

Potter was sitting with Weasley and the Black twins at the Gryffindor table...laughing and joking with admirers all around them; popular and well liked. Griffindors had won the House Cup and Quidditch Cup and the emblem of the Lion hung down from the ceiling.

Neville knew he would never be popular like his father; that despite his status most people viewed him as weak in the quiet sort of way. But he had three, very different friends; friends he deeply cared about and at that moment Neville felt like the luckiest man on earth.

However silence descended when Dumbledore stood up and held out his arms in a welcoming gesture.

“Another year gone and I hope that each one of you will have learnt more this year than you did last year. Some of you will not be returning next year and to those I wish all the best for the future, to others next year will prove to be the next step in your magical

learning journey. Now, it is time I think to give out the prizes. The house cup and Quidditch cup as the points direct, go to Gryffindor house.”

The Gryffindor table erupted into loud cheers while the Hufflepuffs clapped politely in a show of good sportsmanship. The Ravenclaws gave a half-hearted clap and the Slytherins just glared at their rivals.

“Yes, yes, very well done Gryffindor; but this year I have the special honour of giving out four other special awards which I hope will raise spirits. Four Special Awards for Services to the School will be given out to Miss Hermione Granger in Ravenclaw, Mr Neville Longbottom in Hufflepuff, Miss Athenia Rivers and Miss Kate Brown in Slytherin.”

A dumbfounded silence followed this, mainly from the Slytherin table; while half of them tried to work out who Kate Brown was, the other half puzzled what a lowly mudblood could have done to earn such a high favour. This was followed by eager anticipation as many students linked their Awards to the strange resignation of Professor Avatar, the disappearance of Professor Quirrell and how the Boy who lived was hospitalised for a week.

“These four first years have shown outstanding courage, hard work, intelligence, teamwork and cunningness; they have been tested and have passed where many a grown witch or wizard would have failed. To Miss Granger, I award Ravenclaw fifty points for sheer brilliance in the use of simplicity but effectiveness in the face of such despair.”

The Ravenclaw table erupted into cheers; this only put them ten points behind Gryffindor: 190 points to 240 points. Although they hadn’t gotten ahead, it made the blow a lot less. Hermione found herself shaking hands with everyone in her house.

“To Mr Neville Longbottom, I award Hufflepuff house sixty points for outstanding bravery in the face of evil as well as twenty points for pure loyalty towards friends.”

Although they were still last, Hufflepuff had never earned so many points in their life. This took them from their 120 points to 210. The

sheer pride that one member had done this dispelled any upset that they hadn't won.

"Miss Athenia Rivers, I award her 50 points for the most outstanding game of chess Hogwarts has ever seen, as well as utter self sacrifice in the face of adversity."

The Slytherin table erupted in cheers and Athenia found herself being jumped upon by its members.

"And to Miss Kate Brown who despite her initial feelings put others before her, saving lives not once, not twice but three times; I award Slytherin sixty points..."

The roar of Slytherin taking the lead and wining the house cup was so great that the rest of Dumbledore's word were lost in the din, as Kate, astounded and in deep shock, found her shaking hands with people who normally would have jumped in the shower for merely passing her in the hallway.

"So I think, a change of decoration is called for," Dumbledore announced to a very different mix of students; some annoyed beyond belief, some amused and some slightly disappointed but happy that it was someone other than Gryffindor who had won.

A clap of his hands and the decorations changed to the Slytherin serpent. Athenia caught Kate's bewildered look at the attention she was receiving and gave a smirk which was countered by a raised eyebrow.

Athenia found herself pleased that things hadn't changed between them despite the circumstances and when the food appeared, she happily tucked in to a large jacket potato filled with cheese.

But what really made her day was the look of utter disgust and shock on Potters face across the hall as he stabbed his own food violently.

It was the best night of Athenia's life, even better than being told how proud her uncle was of her, even better than making friends with Neville...

Athenia was only one of four students if she but knew it who would never, ever forget tonight.

The next day Athenia got her exams results back and was fairly hopping about for joy that she passed them all with flying colours, even Herbology. Lyra wasn't looking forward to explain to her father why she had failed so abysmally at Potions. Aleric himself, who would be getting his own results later in the summer holidays, went around testy and snappy.

Hermione had come top of the year with Athenia a close second. Kate had done fairly well herself with Neville passing as well, his top Herbology mark making up for his abysmal Defence one.

Then, suddenly, seemingly overnight, their wardrobes were empty and trunks were packed; Neville found Trevor lurking at the back of a Boys toilet and notes were handed out warning about the use of non magic outside school,

"As if I've ever paid attention before," Aleric sneered at the piece of parchment; which was true, Athenia thought to herself and wondered if she herself could practice at home.

Then, just as quickly they were all making their way down to the Hogwarts express. Athenia sat with Lyra, Pansy, Daphne and Malfoy as she told them a very elaborated account of how she had beaten McGonagall chess set.

"Then the King threw down his crown on the floor and made way for Neville to go forwards..."

All the first years were listening with rapt attention, aside from Lyra who had taken to scowling out of the window and Athenia suddenly realised that her cousin was jealous of her. She had won over a hundred points for Slytherin in one year on two occasions and had gotten a Special Award for Services to the School and it was only her first year. The thought that she still had six more years to go and what adventures they would hold brought a smile to her lips, though she was surprised to feel sorry for Lyra.

However, dragging her attention from her cousin she challenged Malfoy to a game of chess. After a raised eyebrow Draco brought out his own chess set and drawled,

“I’m playing black though.”

Athenia merely smiled patronisingly in response.

After successfully beating all the occupants in the compartment at chess, Athenia remembered that she wanted to say goodbye to Neville before the train came to a stop.

Making excuses she left, walking down the corridor; glancing in compartments until she found the right one.

Hermione, Kate and Neville were all sprawled out on the seats; playing a game of exploding snap while eating sweets,

“Athenia!” Neville’s face lit up as he got up, Hermione giving her an unsure look while Kate just glared to hide her uncertainty.

“I’m not sure if I’ll get to say goodbye to you at the station Neville, so I’m here to say goodbye now and I’ll send you an owl over the holidays...”

“Yeah,” Neville responded, rather gloomily Athenia thought, “We’ll work something out.”

Giving him one of her rare smiles, Athenia waved three fingers at him in a goodbye wave as the train screeched to a halt at Kings Cross before disappearing to collect her belongings.

The three friends did the same, pulling down their trunks and stuffing their sweets and games into the trunks.

Outside Neville could already see Athenia with her cousins greeting her uncle and brothers...her back was to them as she showed her uncle her test results. She smiled unsurely at his beaming look.

Neville watched as he turned to Lyra who held out her own. Lyra didn't get a beaming look, more a disappointed frown.

"What's this?" Kate's voice broke through his observation of the Lestrangle family.

Turning round Neville saw that Kate was holding a folded piece of parchment with Hermione and Kate's name on the front in small neat script.

"Open it," Neville prompted as Kate opened the small piece of parchment.

On it were two words in the same neat script,

Thank you

"What does this mean?" Kate demanded.

Neville glanced out of the window where, it seemed, Rodolphus was talking to his son while Athenia spoke to a tall boy with blond hair and cold blue eyes...her brother probably.

He said something and Athenia's pale complexion flooded with colour as her face screwed up in anger.

"I think it's Athenia's way of saying thank you for saving her life," Athenia told them, "Once in the face of those hooded things," he nodded to Hermione, "And once at the chess board," he nodded to Kate who scowled darkly at the parchment.

Hermione however followed his gaze towards Athenia, and watched as she side long apparated with her uncle and brothers.

"Now how will I talk to her...I mean she did save my life in the forest, so I suppose in logical terms that makes us quits," Hermione asked in an exasperated voice as they all climbed off the train and headed for the barrier; one of the last to leave.

“Just be thankful you don’t have to share a dormitory with her,” Kate muttered, though Neville was pleased to see a secret happiness in her eyes.

“Well,” Neville stopped and turned round, and both girls were surprised to see such a broad happy smile on Neville’s face as he continued, “There is always next year.”

End of Story 1

Well, that’s the end of this story. I made it ultra sonically long as I didn’t have the patience to split it into two chapters. To those of you who don’t know I’m not the most patient of people. I’ve really enjoyed writing this story and can feel myself getting more and more into it...story two will probably come once I’ve written the first few chapters which won’t be that long, I promise.

Thanks to everyone who reviewed, either on the one chapter on every chapter. Each meant a lot to me.

Until next time, Jen x